

# Early Childhood Development: Nurturing Successful Learners

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# Overview

- Touchpoints – a relational model of development
- Observation – learning through undirected play
- Learning through relationships
  - ❖ Self regulation
  - ❖ Mutual regulation
  - ❖ Social referencing
  - ❖ Symbolic thought and play
  - ❖ Shared subjectivity
  - ❖ Connecting our stories
- Raising each other's children, strengthening communities

What is  
Touchpoints?

- A developmental phenomenon
- A way of thinking/being – doing/saying
- An approach to working with families in health, early education and care, early intervention and social service settings
- An approach to professional development: changing systems of care to support change in individual practice
- A national site network – learning community
- A Boston-based center

# Development: How Change Happens

- One developmental phase follows another.
- But why does one stop and one start? How?
- And what happens to a phase when it's over?
- How can we support development if we don't understand how change happens?



# **Touchpoints: Una matriz del desarrollo**

**El desarrollo se constituye de momentos de desorganización y de reorganización, de aceleración y de desaceleración**

# Touchpoints: A Developmental Model

Development is characterized by  
**regressions, bursts, and pauses.**

# Touchpoints: disorganization and reorganization

The term “touchpoints” was first coined by T. Berry Brazelton to describe temporary periods of:

- developmental disorganization for the child and family, followed by
- reorganization and the emergence of new developmental capacities.

Heimann M. (Ed.). (2003). *Regression Periods in Human Infancy* (pp. 57-80). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum

# *Points* in time to *Touch* into the family system

These *points* of time of heightened vulnerability for child and family are periods of both risk and opportunity during which health, education and other professionals serving children and their families can *touch* into the family system to:

- prevent developmental derailment and
- help keep development on track.

# Why Touchpoints? Stressors on Families

- Workplace demands on families
- Changes in family structures and roles
- Increased family mobility and isolation
- Increased economic challenges for families
- Stressed education, health and social services
- Erosion of family traditions, neighborhoods and community connections

# Why Touchpoints? A Relational Approach

Reaffirm parents' expertise because

Parents do better as parents when they

- feel confident, competent, and effective
- when they are connected to others rather than isolated



# What are we trying to accomplish?

- School-ready children, employable adults or
- Children with empathy and altruism to become adults capable of
  - nurturing their own children
  - doing their part to strengthen their communities
  - engaging as active participants in civic life
  - making peace with their global neighbors
  - stewarding the fragile planet we are leaving them

How do  
children  
grow,  
develop,  
and  
learn?

# Children Learn Through Relationships

## Processes that require relationships:

- ❖ Self regulation
- ❖ Mutual regulation
- ❖ Social referencing
- ❖ Symbolic thought and play
- ❖ Shared subjectivity
- ❖ Connecting our stories

Through processes that require  
**emotional availability**  
of child, and adult caregivers

# Character skills, pre-academic skills – necessary for academic success and more

- **Attention**
- **Impulse control**
- **Frustration tolerance**
- **Persistence**
- **Motivation**
- **Resourcefulness, flexibility, creativity**
- **Constructive risk-taking**
- **Facing and learning from mistakes**
- **Self-esteem**
- **Understanding one's self and others - emotional intelligence**
- **Communication, collaboration, cooperation, compassion**
- **Conscientiousness, diligence, moral compass**
- **Capacity for planning, forward-thinking behavior – hope**

# What is emotional availability?

- The capacity of two humans (for example infant or child and parent) to be authentically present in the moment



# What hinders emotional availability?

- Isolation
- Sense of powerlessness, disenfranchisement
- Overwhelming stress
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Threatened survival

# Emotional availability can come from:

- support of a **web of relationships** that give adult caregivers the strength to learn from and face their mistakes
- **hope for their child's development**, their future as a family, hope for the world

# State Regulation, Self Regulation

- Deep Sleep
- Light Sleep
- Drowsy
- Alert
- Fussy
- Crying
- Joy
- Despair
- Agitation
- Excitement
- Vigilance
- Frustration
- Anticipation
- Hopefulness
- Fear

# State Regulation

- Each state of consciousness has costs and benefits to be balanced
- States of consciousness allow for different balances between the child's needs and the environment's demands
- Alert states allow the child to communicate with caretakers, while sleep states or “tuning out” protect against over-stimulation

Behavior is state-  
dependent

**Different cultures  
do**

**STATE  
REGULATION**

**differently**

Young children need state  
regulation to engage in  
relationships

Parents and  
other caregivers  
need state  
regulation to  
engage in  
relationships:

Who helps us  
soothe?

Telling my story,  
listening to yours,  
connecting our narratives  
requires:

- Shared subjectivity, (shared states of consciousness)
- theory of mind,
- empathy



# Summary

- State regulation, self regulation
- Mutual regulation
- Social referencing
- Symbolic thought and play
- Self-esteem regulation
- Shared subjectivity, theory of mind
- Empathy
- Connecting our stories

# Connecting our Stories

Amazingly, children are born knowing how to put every thought and feeling into story form. If they worry about becoming lost, they become parents who search. If angry, they find a hot hippopotamus to impose his will upon the world. Even happiness has its plot and character. Pretend I'm the baby and you only love *me* and you don't talk on the telephone.

From *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter* by Vivian Paley

# Touchpoints Principle: Developmental Strategy for Clinical Communication

- Children only develop and thrive in the context of relationships.
- Emotional availability of parent and child is critical to the fundamental processes of child development. But this depends on a wealth of supportive relationships to family, friends, and community.

# Supports for Parents and Other Caregivers' State Regulation

- Social connectedness
- Sense of competence, efficacy, confidence
- Experiences of empowerment
- Caregiving that brings moments of pleasure and joy
- Enduring hope

# What parents need to be the kind of parents *they* want to be for their children

- To perceive themselves as competent
- To feel empowered to make a difference in their children's lives
- To feel connected to a web of supportive relationships – the village
- To feel connected to their pasts, to be emotionally available in the present and to dare to hope for their children's future

# Para enarmorarse de un niño los padres necesitan

- Un sentido de competencia(somos expertos pero los padres también)
- Hacerlos sentir que tienen el poder para obtener lo mejor para sus niños
- Comunidad y conexiones - una red de relaciones
- Conexión con el pasado e identidad cultural
- Esperanza para el futuro— la capacidad para proyectarse a sí mismo, al niño y la familia con esperanza para un futuro mejor

# Meaning of child's behavior to parents and other caregivers

- Not teaching, not just information
- Observation
- Shared Discovery
- Co-construction of meaning

## Pre-requisites

- Emotional availability – in order to observe
- Relationship – in order to share observations, construct meaning