

The Center for Innovative Practices

Resiliency Tool Kit | Resource #3

RESILIENCY RESOURCE #3 | Strengthening Attachment

One of the most basic human needs is connection to others. The earliest relationship, built between the child and his/her caregiver becomes a model for all other relationships in life. This relationship should provide a safe environment for healthy development where the child learns to cope with and express emotions. The following interventions can help stabilize the caregiver/child relationship with healthy attachment strategies.

Caregiver Affect Management - Caregivers may have difficulty coping with and expressing their own emotions, especially if they have their own history of trauma. The good news is that learning and rehearsing self-awareness techniques is a simple way to improve their own emotional regulation, while modeling these healthy strategies for their children. It is virtually impossible to be anxious and uptight while intentionally calming and relaxing. Simply practice these techniques with your children (and anyone else in your family). This will provide good modeling for them, ensure that they can do the skill when you aren't around, and as an added bonus, improve your own self-care!

Deep Breathing – Try belly breathing techniques. Lie down or recline, place your hands on your belly, and take long, slow breaths. You should see and feel your hands rise as the air fills your belly and torso. It doesn't take long, 5-10 breaths are usually sufficient to calm yourself. Once you have this skill, you can do it anytime you feel anxious, upset or frustrated. Plus you can do this anywhere, anytime; you no longer have to lie down to do it. This is a great skill for the caregiver to share with the child and do together.

Muscle Relaxation – Try either guided or self-directed progressive muscle relaxation. You can find a variety of **progressive muscle relaxation** scripts or audio guides online. Find a relaxed position and start with 2-4 deep breaths. Then simply listen to the instructions and allow yourself to relax.

Breaks – Sometimes caregivers need their own "time out", especially when there are intense emotions and/or conflict. Again, you can model doing the right thing by taking 5-10 minutes to calm down and check in with yourself. It can help you to be more focused, effective, and supportive. Make sure you check for safe versus unsafe situations, for example taking a break in your home while your child is in his/her room is usually safe, but taking a break and leaving your child in a public area is not. Also, recognizing unsafe situations for the child and modeling how to separate from those situations is helpful. Communicate this to your child, saying, "I'm upset and need a few minutes to calm down. I'm going to my room, but I'll be back in 5 minutes and we'll talk about this."

ATTACHMENT INTERVENTIONS, adapted from Blaustein, M.E. & Kinniburgh, K.M. (2010) *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents: How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency*. New York: Guilford.

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