



Trauma Smart



The Negative Impact of Stress on Young Children

Studies show that one in four preschool-aged children experience some type of traumatic event – like their parents' divorce, an accident or witnessing violence, drug and alcohol abuse – before they start kindergarten. That percentage increases to nearly one in two for the majority of children in Trauma Smart's Head Start programs across Missouri and the Kansas City region.

High levels of prolonged stress interfere with a young child's brain development. Their hearts race, they can't sleep, have difficulty paying attention and may experience stomachaches and headaches. Their emotions surface in a number of ways. Some children withdraw or avoid fellow classmates or adults, while others react with anger by crying, screaming or hurting someone else. High levels of stress cause academic delays and are linked to physical and mental health issues later in life. Adults often misinterpret this behavior and expel children from school because they don't know how to help.

At the same time, the adults who care for the children each day – their parents and teachers – are often experiencing such chronic stress as a lifestyle. They also find it difficult to regulate their own emotions; much less help the children cope.

The Trauma Smart Model

The Crittenton Children's Center in Kansas City, Mo. uses its Trauma Smart model to help preschool children and the adults who care for them calmly navigate difficult life challenges. We pair practical, hands-on tools with effective coping strategies and bring them into the places where kids learn and play every day.

Our model:

- Prepares children for social and academic success;
- Actively includes parents in their child's school experience;
- Improves the work environment for teachers and school personnel; and
- Creates practical and enduring change for children, families and communities.

Proven and Effective

Our outcomes to date show that 100 percent of the Head Start children engaged in the Trauma Smart model have benefited from an improved school environment. Teachers love that they are spending their days teaching rather than managing difficult behaviors.

Now that I know the Trauma Smart techniques I can breathe and teach. I am able to deal with the social-emotional issues on one hand and teach with the other and still have a classroom environment that's a community. Kids can learn and feel cared for and safe.

-Teacher in a Trauma Smart classroom

The Trauma Smart model is founded on evidence-based interventions recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network to be effective in helping children and the adults who care for them effectively address the negative impact of violence and trauma.

Trauma Smart is scaling up and testing adaptations in communities across Missouri, in order to go on to provide solutions that meet the distinct and diverse needs of families, classrooms and communities across the country. By working closely with parents, their children, teachers, school officials and community leaders, Trauma Smart is tailored to meet each classroom's specific needs.

For more information about Trauma Smart or to watch a video about our program, visit www.traumasmart.org or email us at traumasmart@saint-lukes.org.

"Teaching Children to Calm Themselves"

Adapted from article by David Bornstein, *New York Times*, March 19, 2014

In his Head Start class, Luke would explode into rages, screaming, pushing or hitting other children or his teachers. It inhibited his ability to learn and caused considerable distress to his classmates, teachers and grandparents.

Luke's difficulties stem from his earliest experiences. His mother was unable to attend to him and his father was sent to prison shortly after his first birthday. Now he lives with his grandparents.

Luke is receiving individual therapy. But he is also surrounded by caregivers who understand his needs and know how to respond when he needs help. Through the Head Start Trauma Smart model, teachers, parents and even the bus drivers and cafeteria workers who interact with children receive training in trauma.