Trauma-Informed Services and Policies to Support Immigrant and Mixed Status Families in Early Care and Education:

Impacts of Immigration Trauma on the Health and Development of Young Children

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Presenters

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Impacts of Immigration Trauma on the Health and Development of Young Children

1. Immigration, Trauma and Loss
2. Trauma-Focused and Diversity-Informed Tools and Strategies
3. Addressing Threats of Separation: Family Preparedness Plan
4. Creating Safe Space
5. Questions?
6. What’s Next?
Poll: Who is on the call?

My work is primarily:

• Legislative
• State agency
• Advocacy
• Philanthropy
• Program for families and children
• Direct service provider
• Other (please enter into chat box)
Poll: If you are a direct care provider....

My work is:

• Home Visitor
• Early Intervention
• Center based child care
• Family Child Care
• Visiting Nurse
• Social worker
• Other (please enter into chat box)
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Goals and Objectives

Participants will:

• Describe what immigration trauma is and what causes it.

• Identify the long- and short-term effects (cognitive, socio-emotional, psychological, relational) of threats of separation or actual forced separation on young children and their parents/caregivers.

• Describe developmentally, trauma and diversity-informed tools (Family Preparedness Plan) and interventions aimed at increasing safety, affect regulation, empowerment, and hope.
Agenda

• Welcome
• Reflective Exercise
• Immigration, Trauma and Loss
• Trauma-Focused and Diversity-Informed Tools and Strategies
• Questions and Final Reflections
Reflection

• If unexpectedly you had to leave the country in 24 hours, what would be your priority? What would be your plan?
Immigration, Trauma, and Loss
Intersectionality matters!
Tenet # 1 - Self-awareness Leads to Better Services for Families

Professionals in the field of infant mental health must reflect on their own culture, personal values, and beliefs, and on the impact racism, classism, sexism, able-ism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other systems of oppression have had on their lives in order to provide diversity-informed, culturally attuned services on behalf of infants, toddlers, and their families.

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https://diversityinformedtenets.org
Luz:
“Mami, no quiero que la migra te lleve”
Immigration: A Complex Psychosocial Process

That includes the initial decision to leave, the process of migration, and acclimatization to the new country (Perez Foster, 2005)

Social determinants of the psychic organization of migrant children and families
Mixed-Status Families

• Mixed status families come from all over the world, but the majority in the US are from Mexico and other places in Latin America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador-Northern Triangle)

• In the US, there are more than 9 million children whose parents are undocumented immigrants

• Approximately 4.9 million of these children were born in the U.S. to undocumented or mixed status parents (about 8% of all US children)

• 91% of these children are under the age of 6 (Passel & Cohn, 2009)

• Among children of Latino immigrants, about 4 in 10 second-generation immigrant children live in a mixed-status family

WHY DO THEY MIGRATE?
THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE:
HISTORICAL CONTEXT, PUSH/PULL ACTORS
Historical Context

• Political violence and massacres in Central American countries at different points of time between 1960 and 2000:
  • El Salvador (1979-1992)
  • Guatemala (1960-1996)
  • Honduras (1980’s)
• Currently, social violence as the aftermath of historical trauma, transmitted across generations and perpetuated through social dynamics

Casas & Noroña
Historical Trauma

Social and Political Violence

Community Fragmentation

Family Ruptures

Migrant Children and Families

Casas & Noroña
Push Factors

- Deprivation, Abuse in the Home and Violence in Society
- Violence in Society, Violence in Home, Recruitment by Organized Crime
- Violence by Organized Armed Criminal Actors
- Threats from or Victimization by Organized Armed Criminal Actors
Before, During, After, Now...

When Immigration Is Trauma – Perez Foster, 2001

Casas & Noroña
Immigration Trauma and Undocumented Status

- Extreme anxiety
- Pre-migration stressors
- Extra and intra-familiar stressors
- Mental health disorders
- Traumatic stress

Desjarlais, 1995; Cavazoz-Regh et al, 2007; America Psychological Association, 2012

Casas & Noroña
Immigration Enforcement Policy: Impact
Immigration Enforcement

- Migrant Families
- Mixed-Status Families
- Immigrant and Refugee Families
IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT AND MIXED-STATUS FAMILIES

http://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/immigration-psychology.aspx
Mixed-Status Families Face Unique Threats!

- Parental vulnerability to detention and deportation
- Increased risk for family separation
- Confusion

The Ripple Effect of the Fear of Detention/Deportation

UNDOCUMENTED STATUS + THREATS OF DEPORTATION = TRAUMATIC STRESS

Noroña
Impact on Young Children

- Dysregulation
- Withdrawal
- Angry non-compliance
- Attachment difficulties
- Extreme separation anxiety
- Increased arousal
- Increased anxiety: concern for self and loved ones
- Regression
- Aggression

- Psychosomatic symptoms
- Developmental delays
- Safety uncertainty
- Identity formation: “bad”, “illegal”, “criminal”, “alien”, “dangerous”
- Contradictory feelings
- Confusion and shame
- Other symptoms

Casas & Noroña
Impact on Caregivers

- Isolation
- Feelings of being “hunted”, trapped, disoriented, confused, lonely, distrustful
- Triggers
- Emotional availability and reflective functioning
- Risk for PTSD and other mental health issues
Impact on Relationships

• Attachment system organizes children’s responses to safety and fear
• Perception of safety
• Perception of loss
• Immigration as toxic stressor

(Scheeringa & Zeanah, 1995)
When Fear Becomes Reality: Effects of Parental Loss

**Short Term**
- Family fragmentation
- Loss of income
- Loss of childcare
- Inability to meet basic needs
- Relocation
- Child placement in Child Welfare System
- Further Isolation
- Increased fear
- Decreased engagement in community and health services

**Long Term**
- Social isolation
- Depressive symptoms in remaining caregiver
- Child symptoms:
  - separation anxiety
  - aggression
  - contradictory feelings towards caregivers
  - shame / anger for caregiver’s arrest
  - withdrawal
  - loss of appetite and sleep disturbance
  - Depression and post traumatic stress symptoms

(Chaudry el al. 2010; National Council of La Raza, 2007)
When Fear Becomes a Reality: Traumatic Separation and Loss

• From an attachment and trauma lens, the unexpected separation between a parent and child, as is the case in deportation/detention, can disrupt all aspects of a child’s functioning
• The deleterious impact of the traumatic loss of loved ones for young children’s brain development, ability to self-regulate, and to form relationships is well accepted
• Children who experience this kind of loss can present posttraumatic responses clinically similar to traumatic grief
• Some researchers have used the term *ambiguous loss* (Luster et al, 2008) to describe this complex experience
Ambiguous Loss

Definition: A loss that remains unclear

• **Premise**: uncertainty or lack of information about the whereabouts or status of a loved one as absent or present, dead or alive, is potentially traumatic

• Closure is impossible

• Without information to clarify the loss, people are forced to live with the ongoing paradox of absence and presence (Boss, 2007)
Trauma-Focused and Diversity-Informed Tools and Strategies

Introduction
A Culture of Fear

• Fear is an approach aimed at discouraging new immigrants and a force used against those who are out of status

• In mixed-status families, it is insidious and continuous

• For millions of children with an undocumented relative, or who are undocumented themselves, fear can be manifested in withdrawal from normative activities or from accessing services, and in symptoms of emotional pain and traumatic stress

• For thousands of children who were taken away from their caregivers, and for their caregivers, it is manifested by an overwhelming sense of loss that can persist even after the reunification

Freedom from Fear: A Human Right

A Proactive Approach to Fear Reduction

• Reducing fear is a therapeutic goal and a social justice goal
• In the absence of significant immigration reform, providers should proactively:
  o Create interpersonal safety through self-exploration
  o Become trusted resources
  o Facilitate or provide appropriate mental health services
  o Empower families

A Diversity- and Trauma-Informed Approach to Services: Practical and Clinical Implications

Interventions with these families must encompass a:

1. Historical and socio-cultural lens
2. Multipronged, multilayered, multidisciplinary approach including:
   - Stabilization and safety
   - Increasing access to resources
   - Coordination of care and advocacy
   - Comprehensive assessment (developmental, mental health, trauma exposure including immigration history, historical trauma, and experiences of oppression)
   - Collaborative intervention planning
A Diversity- and Trauma-Informed Approach to Services: Practical and Clinical Implications

3. Focus on safety, meaning-making and choice:
   - Increasing safety (in the environment, relationships)
   - Building regulation capacities in parents/caregivers and children
   - Restoring/enhancing child-caregiver relationship
   - Helping the caregiver and child make meaning of the impact of the immigration traumas (including separation and reunification) on each other
   - Help discussing immigration topics in developmentally appropriate ways
   - Removing the stigma, the taboo, “speaking the unspeakable”
   - Empower families/parents: *Family Preparedness Plan, Know your Rights*
   - Enhancing resiliency
   - Providing hope

4. Caring for the helper
Tools and Strategies TO INCREASE EMPOWERMENT, HOPE, AND HEALING
Addressing Threats of Separation: Family Preparedness Plan
FPP: Background

- November 2016: Presidential Election
- December 2016: Zero to Three Conference (New Orleans)
- January 2017: Weekly meetings
  - Ivys Fernández-Pastrana, Family Navigator, DBP
  - Kara Hurvitz, Attorney, MLPB
  - Carmen Rosa Noroña, Clinician, Child Witness to Violence Project
- Lit Review: NIÑOS, Legal Services Alabama, J. Brent Helms
- May 2017: Family Preparedness Plan
What is a Family Preparedness Plan?

Safety plan that offers parents and caregivers facing the threat of detention or deportation the opportunity to make decisions about:

• Who will care for their children in their absence
• Plans for meeting child’s educational, medical, and emotional needs in a parent’s absence
• Plans for reunification
• It is NOT a clinical/mental health/educational assessment or evaluation tool.
• The plan can be filled out section-by-section and adjusted to each family’s needs.
• You do not have to fill out every section!
Content

• Massachusetts specific
• Information on:
  • How to choose a caregiver for a child
  • Legal documents to designate a caregiver
• Safety
• Family Reunification Plan
• Talking to a child about an emergency separation
• Child’s Personal Information
  • Early Intervention Services
  • Child Care, Early Head Start, Head Start
  • Education Information
  • School Special Education Services
  • In-home Services
  • Medical Information
  • Medical History
  • Family History
  • Child’s Routines
What Else Does the FPP Include?

- Suggestions on how to talk with a child about an unexpected family separation.
- Things to consider when talking with children about sudden family separation.
- How to choose a caregiver for a child and requirements to be a caregiver.
- Information about legal documentation needed to designate a caregiver.
- How to obtain a passport for a child.
- How do parents or caregivers can take care of themselves.
For Facilitators: Self-care

While supporting our families is our utmost priority, having these conversations could be triggering and overwhelming. Try to:

- Pace yourself – How many times a day can you have these conversations?
- If feeling stressed, focus your attention on your breathing. Notice your breath as you inhale and as you exhale. Or notice your balance as you center your weight.
- Have body awareness - Notice whether your body is tense or relaxed. If any parts are tight or constricted, observe the tension and then see if you can soften it or gently let it go.
- If you run into any roadblock, ask for help.
- Find a supportive network where you can share your feelings and experiences and find resources.
- Pay attention to self-care: eat, exercise, and sleep regularly.
- Seek reflective supervision
Addressing the Effects of Threats of Separation and Traumatic Separation in ECE Settings
Creating safe spaces

Program Implications
Safe Space Policies

• Key components
  • Staff roles and responsibilities
  • How staff should interact with federal immigration agents
  • How you’ll minimize disruption
  • How you’ll notify parents

Develop and Strengthen Relationships with Parents/Caregivers

• Assist parents in feeling connected to the provider of care, early care setting

• Facilitate regular meetings or other ways of communication to address parents/caregivers questions/concerns and input

• Inviting space and activities to promote the caregiver/child relationship

• Help parents feel competent:
  • Information about development and trauma
  • Offer support and validation with their challenges
  • Create space for the caregiver to recognize their own stress and needs
Creating Safe Spaces

Building Resiliency in the Children
Build Restorative Relationships

• Create opportunities for continuity of care and relationships with caregivers
• Help them to be with and connect with other children
• Individualize interactions with children

Talk with and Listen to Young Children

- I see you
- I hear You
- I care
- I am trying to understand
- I can help
- You are safe here

Build Restorative Relationships: Promote Co-regulation

• Playtime/Activity Time Strategies
  o Leave agenda outside focus on building a relationship
  o Have uninterrupted playtime
  o Provide developmentally, linguistically and socio-culturally appropriate materials and activities that promote interaction and affect regulation (books, peek-a-boo, singing songs, movement/body-based activities, transitional objects)
  o Let child take the lead (offer choice of toys and let the child pick)
  o Facilitate experiences with other children and the community

• Providers’ Behavior
  o Show them you care about their needs, be reliable
  o Talk to the child in their language
  o Identify and name feelings
  o Help the child understand limits
  o Use a calm tone of voice and be ok with silence
  o Make your interactions predictable, warm and positive
  o Cuddle, touch, have close physical contact and show affection—*If you are allowed and the child wants it*
  o Provide them with opportunities to succeed, and recognize their strengths
Create Diversity-Informed Safe Environments: Identify, Manage, and Anticipate Triggers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensory Information</th>
<th>Emotional and Behavioral Dysregulation</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Loud noises, noises (sirens)</td>
<td>• Feelings of anger, sadness or fear</td>
<td>• Too many people/crowded places</td>
<td>• Changes in routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Smells</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Strangers</td>
<td>• Separation from caregivers/staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Physical touch</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Police officers/people in uniforms</td>
<td>• Transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Images or sites</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hand or body gestures</td>
<td>• Confusion or chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being in the dark</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Stern and scary people</td>
<td>• Other children coming and going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not being held or touched</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Being left alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being talked to constantly and by different people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hearing bad things being told about their family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Create Diversity-Informed Safe Environments

Foster rituals and routines that include socio-cultural practices

Design environments that “speak” to children and their families

Create opportunities for talking, listening and sharing

Offer a range of socio-culturally appropriate toys and materials for all areas of development

Create Diversity-Informed Safe Environments: Pay Attention to Transitions

- Staff
- Peers
- Routines
- Strategies for communication and support
# Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impulse Control</th>
<th>Sensory Materials</th>
<th>Narrate</th>
<th>Attachment</th>
<th>Youtube videos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fast/slow games</td>
<td>• Lotion</td>
<td>• Social Stories</td>
<td>• Hand clapping games</td>
<td>• Belly breathe-Elmo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Freeze dance</td>
<td>• Drumming</td>
<td>• Use feeling words to</td>
<td>• Hide and Seek</td>
<td>• Mindfulness-cookie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pop a bubble only when</td>
<td>• Squishy toys</td>
<td>build child’s motivational</td>
<td></td>
<td>monster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the word “___” is said</td>
<td></td>
<td>vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Courtesy of Courtney Bailey (2015)
Help Children Cope:  
Making Sense of Separation and Loss

- Think about what a child might be feeling.
- Ask yourself how you can respond to let them know you understand.
- Staying “in tune” with a child’s feelings helps build feelings of trust and security.
- Try to understand why a child may be behaving the way they are and what they really need at this time.
  - Consider socio-cultural, developmental, and trauma factors
  - Think of how the child may feel if you respond in a certain way to them.
  - Allow the children to express (verbally and nonverbally) what they are feeling.
  - Reassure them that these big feelings are okay when scary things happen and that they might feel physically uncomfortable
- Help the children stay connected with their family and culture,
  - Explore foods, activities, routines in ways that they can feel closer to their traditions
Help Children Cope: Making Sense of Separation and Loss

Convey to children that someone will be there to take care of their needs (use play, body language, books, the physical environment, words).

Create, organize and verbalize a developmentally and linguistically appropriate story/narrative about what the child might be feeling and of what happened that helps connect feelings with behavior.

Using simple words will help the infants/young children begin to making sense of the separation experience.

Help Children Cope: Making Sense of Separation and Loss

Convey hope

• Through the environment, body and verbal language.
• Affirm the relationship with caregivers while separated
• Avoid negative comments about their parents.
• Provide developmentally appropriate and truthful information without making false promises
  ▪ e.g. Many, many people are trying to help you and your daddy/mommy to be together again

Keep it simple and build trust

• Tell the children is not their fault
  ▪ e.g. It’s not your fault that mommy/daddy are not with you. Mommy had to stay with the guards but she is working hard to be with you again
Rupture and Repair: Pay to the Self

- **Self-awareness**
  - Increase awareness of the feelings, thoughts that the children and work might elicit in you (frustration, hopelessness)
  - Pay attention to your body and to its reactions (tiredness, aches, pains)
  - Be mindful of your body language, proximity to the child, gaze, tone of voice

- **Manage your emotional responses**
  - Avoid showing rejection, anger, fear in response to the child’s strong emotional behavior
  - If you were not able to stay calm and regulate in the moment, take a break

- **Seek reflective supervision or peer support to process your feelings/responses and impact of the work**

- **Re-connect with the child, once you are calm**
  - Identify an enjoyable activity that the child likes and you can share with them
  - Keep the child company, verbalize in simple words what happened and reassure the child that you care about them.
  - Explain, apologize, and ask the child what was bothering them
Organizational Strategies

- Supporting the Staff
  - Pay attention to child-caregiver ratio
  - Provide training and consultation to develop and enhance skills
  - Identify and eliminate inequities (e.g., overburdening staff who are bilingual)
  - Create policies and practices to prevent secondary effects of the work in staff (Vicarious Trauma, Secondary Traumatic Stress)
  - Implement diversity-informed Reflective Practice and Supervision from the top down and the bottom

- Screening, Assessment, Case Planning
  - Developmentally, Linguistic and Cultural Sensitive Screening and Assessment
  - Developmental
  - Trauma history
  - Make referrals
  - Developmental and educational services
  - Trauma-Informed Intervention, Diagnosis, and Treatment
Promote Trauma-Informed Environments

• Begins with understanding:
  • Impact on every aspect of the child’s functioning/development
  • Impact on the family
  • Impact on all those within the early care and community, both directly and indirectly
• Shifting the lens through which we view children and their families:
  • “What’s wrong with you?” → “What has happened to you?”
• Building strategies to support providers/educators as they support the children.
• Change is implemented across all domains through collective and collaborative efforts from leaderships, administration, providers, staff, and volunteers.
Closing Points

• “Infants are citizens of the world. It is the responsibility of the global community to support parents, families and local communities in welcoming, protecting, and nurturing them” (St John, Thomas, Noroña, 2012, p. 16).

• Migration-related separation and separation are case examples of the notion that social justice is linked inextricably with the field of infant and early childhood mental health (Thomas, St John, Noroña, 2012, as cited by Lieberman and Olive-Bucio, 2018).

• As providers, our job is to help families to get accurate information, begin to think about the unthinkable, talk about the unspeakable and develop a sense of control and choice about what is best for them and their children if they get separated.

• At an advocacy level it is more important than ever to bring the attention of policy makers and researchers to the babies, the thousands of babies who wait in liminality for their rights to be enforced.
Questions & Reflections

Thank you for taking this journey with us today.
Contact Information

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Questions?
What’s next?
Trauma-Informed Services and Policies to Support Immigrant and Mixed-Status Families in Early Care and Education

Trauma-Informed Approach to Working with Providers and Families

July 11, 2019