The Touchpoints Approach: Developmental and Relational Frameworks

Name of Presenter
TOUCHPOINTS NATIONAL NETWORK

Touchpoints
Over 100 multi-discipline sites across US and Internationally
What is the Touchpoints Approach?

A way of providing care to families by:

• understanding development and

• supporting relationships.
Goals of Touchpoints

- Optimal child development
- Healthy, functional families
- Competent and healthy professionals
- Strong communities
“As young children develop, their early emotional experiences literally become embedded in the architecture of their brains.”

J.P. Shonkoff, Chair
National Scientific Council on the Developing Child; Working Paper 2; Winter 2004
KEY ELEMENTS

1. Developmental process/developmental agenda
2. Systems Theory
3. Culturally Sensitive
4. Relational framework and strategies
5. Reflective Practice
KEY ELEMENT #1

Developmental Process/
Developmental agenda
Three Sources Of Energy For Development

External Feedback System

Internal Feedback System

CNS Maturation as a Force

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DEVELOPMENT IS NOT LINEAR

Smooth

Spurts

FUNCTIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL STATUS

TIME MONTHS

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Developmental Framework

Development is characterized by regressions, bursts, and pauses.
Disorganization in One System Can Disorganize Others

Child’s Functional and Developmental Status

Time

Motor

Language

Cognitive

Emotional

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Regressions in a child's behavior cause disorganization for parents
Normal Disorganization is Regulated by the Parent-Child System

Child’s Functional and Developmental Status

PARENT

CHILD

Walking
Mood
Sleep
Interaction

Time

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Parent of a 7 Month Old:

Ever since he was six weeks old he would sleep all night. Now this last week he's standing up in the crib. Before, if he fussed a little bit you could go in and give him a pacifier and he'd go back to sleep. Occasionally he would do that. Now he's wide awake standing up. 3 o'clock in the morning and he's ready to play. If I lay him down, he pops back up again. You let him play a few minutes and he goes back to bed. For the last six months he's been sleepy and now he's not. We were really spoiled. I don't know what to do.
What do you think the behavior means to the parents?
Value
Disorganization
Disorganization is Not Error...

Disorganization is the Wellspring of Change
Providers Aims to Avoid or Overcome Derailment but NOT the Disorganization

Providers Work with Child-Parent Regulatory System

Child’s Functional and Developmental Status

NORMAL PARENTING and DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENTAL DERAILMENT

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What are Touchpoints?

“Touchpoints” are predictable periods of regression and disorganization that occur before bursts in a child’s development.
Some children at their own pace
**Touchpoints** are often accompanied by parental frustration and self-doubt.

These periods of disorganization can **disrupt** family relations, but can also provide an **opportunity** for providers to connect with parents.
KEY ELEMENT #2

Systems Theory
A Systems Approach to Using Touchpoints with Children and Families
KEY ELEMENT #3

Culturally Sensitivity
Joining a system of care

• The cross-cultural and historical norm is that parenting is nested in a broader system of relationships

• We are seeking a shift from asking the child and family to join a new system to our joining their system

• Touchpoints offers a means to join the family system of care
KEY ELEMENT #4

Relational framework and strategies
All of early development—cognitive, motor, language and communication, growth—occurs within social and emotional development, and within the system of caregiving relationships.

(www.developingchild.net)

The Neurobehavioral and Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Young Children, Dr. E. Tronick, 2007


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Relational Framework

• A Touchpoint is an opportunity for the professional to join with a parent to form a supportive partnership.

• Collaboration between the parent and the provider is key to effective anticipatory guidance.

• Interactions focus on parental strengths.
Anticipatory Guidance Can Facilitate Parental Response

Diagram courtesy of Edward Tronick

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KEY ELEMENT #5

Reflective Practice
Guiding Principles

1) Value and understand the relationship between you and the parent
2) Use the behavior of the child as your language
3) Recognize what you bring to the interaction
4) Be willing to discuss matters that go beyond your traditional role
Guiding Principles

5) Look for opportunities to support parental mastery

6) Focus on the parent child relationship

7) Value passion wherever you find it

8) Value disorganization and vulnerability as an opportunity
Guiding Principles as Strategies

• What did you see, hear or feel?
  – What meaning did you make of it?
• What did you do?
  – What did you expect the parent to do?
• What did the parent say or do?
  – What meaning did you make of it?
Parent Assumptions

- The parent is the expert on his/her child
- All parents have strengths
- All parents want to do well by their child
- All parents have something critical to share at each developmental stage
- All parents have ambivalent feelings
- Parenting is a process built on trial and error
Provider Assumptions

• Each provider is the expert within the context of his or her practice setting
• Providers want to be competent
• Providers need support and respect of the kind we are asking them to give to parents
• Providers need to reflect on their contribution to parent provider interactions
A PARADIGM SHIFT

FROM:
- Deficit Model
- Linear Development
- Prescriptive
- Objective Involvement
- Strict Discipline Boundaries

TO:
- Positive Model
- Multidimensional Development
- Collaborative
- Empathic Involvement
- Flexible Discipline Boundaries

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What is Touchpoints?

- A developmental phenomenon
- A way of understanding and being with families
- An evidence-based approach to working with families
- An approach to where we join the family’s system of care rather than the family joining our system of care
- A national site network and a Boston-based professional development center
Additional References

To access a complete literature review and evidence base, visit www.brazeltontouchpoints.org