

Introduction

Why Become Trauma Smart: The overview introduces the caregiver to the Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs) study by Anda and Felitti and its relevance for both children and adults. Concepts explored include the trauma lens, universal precautions, the Trauma Smart Approach and the ARC blocks.

Attachment

Developing a Common Language: This topic provides more information from the Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs) study with emphasis on the importance of early intervention in mediating the negative impact of trauma. It also teaches a simple analogy to explain complex brain science. This module sets the stage for the ARC concepts that follow.

Caregiver Affect Management: This topic helps caregivers (agency staff, teachers, parents, guardians, etc.) develop skills to manage their feelings, particularly in times of stress so that caregivers can provide calm, consistent nurturing and limit setting to children affected by trauma.

Attunement: Attunement is the ability to accurately read another person's verbal and non-verbal cues in order to build relationship. This helps caregivers learn how to identify the child's feelings/energy and validate feelings prior to setting limits around behavior.

Routines and Rituals/Consistent Response: Trauma Smart teaches these ARC concepts together. Daily routines are critical to a child's ability to feel safe. Rituals provide a sense of belonging. Responding consistently is critical to establishing trust, especially with children whose lives have been filled with inconsistency. This training also includes information about the importance of utilizing praise, positive reinforcement, limit setting and behavior management strategies that are non-shame based.

Self-Regulation

Affect Identification: Children with traumatic stress often live with their brains and bodies on high alert. Affect identification helps children and caregivers learn how to identify and label their feelings and energy accurately. It teaches children/caregivers how to discriminate the emotional cues of others and link their emotions to current life experience.

Affect Modulation and Expression: Inability to modulate emotions is often a key deficit for children who have experienced trauma. Children affected by traumatic stress have a tendency to over-control or shut down emotional experience (constriction, numbing, avoidance, isolating, distraction, fantasy/daydreaming, etc.) or manage emotional arousal through heightened behaviors or physical stimulation (physical movement, jumping, running, rocking, aggression, sexualized behaviors, etc.). Teaching children how to increase or decrease their arousal states in safe ways is crucial for on-going developmental progress. Sharing emotional expression is a key aspect of human relationships. An inability to communicate affect prevents children from being able to form and maintain healthy attachments. Learning appropriate ways to express themselves in verbal and non-verbal communication is primary to children's ability to develop healthy relationships.

Competency

Grief and Loss: This topic is not part of the original ARC framework. It has been added by Trauma Smart to explain how children grieve. It provides insights that help adults attune to the emotional distress of children who have suffered loss and describes the differences between normal grief and traumatic grief.

Strengthening Executive Functions: Executive functions help us navigate the world in a goal-directed, thoughtful way. These skills include the ability to delay or inhibit response, participate in active decision-making, anticipate consequences, evaluate outcomes and generate alternative solutions to problems. These skills are often delayed in children who have complex trauma, yet they are crucial to the child's future success. **Strengthening executive function** also helps adults identify and counteract cognitive distortions children often hold about themselves and the world that can impede healthy development.

Self-Development and Identity and Trauma Integration: In infancy and early childhood, identity formation begins as a basic awareness of self as separate from but related to others. Trauma impacts the development of a coherent, positive identity and sense of self due to the internalization of negative experiences, fragmented experiences, and lack of safety to allow for normative exploration. Children who have experienced trauma need help from caring adults to develop an integrated sense of self, social skills, motor skills, learning readiness, personal responsibility, independent functioning, and community connections.