

Supporting Healthy and Active Early Childhood Development

Situation

During early childhood, children’s brains are developing at a rate unequaled through the rest of their lives. Children’s ongoing interactions, primarily with adult caregivers, form the basis for how their neurological pathways are constructed and how their brains process emotional, cognitive, and sensory information. By focusing on what adults can do to advance positive brain development in children, we can provide opportunities for caregivers to build better brains that allow children to work collaboratively, get along with other people, and control one’s emotions. These are the skills most valued in the future job market, in family relationships, and in personal health and well-being.

What We Did

The Family and Child Development PFT has spearheaded an effort to provide evidence-based programming across Kansas to help early childhood professionals become proficient in supporting positive neurological development in young children. Adapting and implementing the Better Brains for Babies curriculum, a collaboration with the University of Georgia, has provided the opportunities for many professionals to move from a deficit-based approach to parenting and child care (e.g. “you need training”), to a strengths-based approach (e.g. “let us make smarter kids!”). These efforts have resulted in over 110 trainers now certified to provide professional KDHE approved in-service trainings to early childhood professionals in such diverse settings as occupational therapy, nursing, clergy, librarians, early literacy professionals, and beyond.

Outcomes

Participants in these trainings increased their own understanding of neurological development, the importance positive and intentional adult-child interaction, and how to mitigate the effects of stress and trauma on young children. Further, these trainers are now providing their own audiences with these skill-building resources, and effecting change in their own settings. Specifically, trainers have responded that they learned the following:

- “Teaching and as well learning new techniques with my families to improve the use of their kid’s brain with activities and crafts instead of using mobile devices at all times.”
- “This training had key components that can be life changing for children! What a wonderful training tool.”

Success Story

A family with an infant and a three year-old reported that they now are intentional when caring for their children. Before they were trained by a certified trainer they did not take much time to engage in “serve and return” interactions (i.e. taking turns in conversation and activities), but after the training they modified the way they interact with their infant and young child in a much more intentional and supportive fashion, regarding the training the mother wrote: “Honestly everything was helpful to me, I have more knowledge about how babies’ brains work”.

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