

A stylized, colorful illustration of a landscape. The background features wavy bands of blue and white, suggesting a sky or water. In the foreground, there are rolling green hills with a brown path. On the left, there is a green tree, a purple flower, and an orange butterfly. A small red bird is flying in the upper left. The overall style is modern and artistic.

“Nesting: Developing Relationship Skills that Change the World”

2018 Resilience & Toxic Stress Conference
Sponsored by: Project AWARE | ESC Northeast Ohio | OhioGuidestone

May 30, 2018

Benjamin W. Kearney, Ph.D.

*OhioGuidestone
Executive Vice President & Chief Clinical Officer*

Toxic Stress:

Threatens Health, Sense of Safety & Personality

“Threats downshift functioning for most people, putting them in a **self-protective mode**...When a threat is perceived, whether in real time or from reminder triggers of prior experience, it can take over the mind/brain, leaving one with next to no free will about how to act. The frontal lobe system’s “brakes” don’t work properly, and the result is an individual in the throes of past conditioning...Threat reactivity leads to reactive aggression, reactive submission, or social withdrawal.”

- Toxic Stress distorts Neuroception
 - Detecting safety is inclusive of the detection of risk
 - When Safety Detected: stress response system dampens
 - When Danger Detected –or– Neuroception Distorted: stress response system activated and persists

Brain Impacts of Toxic Stress

Plasticity

Gene Expression

Hippocampal Damage

Cell Shrinkage & Death

Reduced Brain Size

Corpus Callosum Development

Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) Development

Bonobos



Chimps,



Bonobos

- Bonobos are smaller, less muscled.
- Bonobos have a longer life span—especially males, and especially males in leadership, lower levels of cortisol
- Significantly less aggressive
- More female dominance—power related to family structure
- Use opiate/oxytocin triggered behaviors to navigate social interaction
- Have much larger family/tribe group size.

Toxic Stress: Threatens Health, Sense of Safety & Personality

- Goal for body to return to baseline after perceived danger or threat resolved, BUT
 - Toxic Stress causes imbalanced Stress Response System maintenance
(Cortisol's effects)
 - Toxic Stress increases and/or inappropriately activates Safety Ethic
- Safety Ethic: subjective self-protection mindset
 - Self-preservative: not considerate of others; focus on own self-homeostasis
 - “Egocentric Homeostasis”
 - Purely reflexive response
 - “Good & Right” in the moment of danger
 - Based on Innate perception of danger
 - No attunement of others; No empathy
 - Affective processes invoked: RAGE, FEAR PANIC
 - Safety Ethic= World of “ME”

“Nesting”

- Goals is to create Nurturing and Responsive Environment before, during after pregnancy
- Soothing Perinatal Experience
- Positive Touch
- Responsivity
- Breastfeeding
- Allomothers
- Play
- Social-Support & Positive Climate

Brains & Personality Development

The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) - directs the internal muscles and organs unconsciously—especially in response to emotion—processes in the Right Brain

Right Brain

- Dominant for self-regulation and survival until 36-42 months
- Non-consciously processes implicit social and emotional information
- Serves as the link between the unconscious mind and the body
- Unconsciously processes emotional stimuli (inputs to the brain from the body)
- Dominant for the implicit, nonconscious reception, expression and communication of emotion
- Builds the “Self” &
 - Stores representations of the emotional events associated with experienced events

Sense of Self

- *Sense of self begins to develop, based on feelings of self-efficacy (a beginning sense of feeling control over action and communication with caregivers) and self-esteem, when*
 - *Infant feels successful at accomplishing a goal*
 - *Development of a positive sense of self is strongly related to responsive caregiving (6-12 months+)*
- *Working models of attachment develop, allowing the toddler to develop some autonomous self-protective and self-soothing behaviors, especially between 24 and 36 months*
- *Toddlers' egocentric view of the world, combined with their need to feel autonomous and in control, limits their ability to share or acknowledge others' different intentions (16 months to 3 years)*
- *Beginning understanding of reciprocity develops through play with peers (2-3 years)*
- *Imitation of parental behavior implicitly incorporates a beginning understanding of social expectations (2-3 years)*
- *Ability to observe and imitate others facilitates learning (1-3 years)*

What are we teaching through relationships?

- People best learn through dyadic regulation
 - Remember: CO-REGULATION!
 - Will learn, internalize and replicate caregivers' ways of regulating
 - Why must teach and equip caregivers

Developmental Tasks around Shame Modulation

- *Internalization of standards:*
 - *Notice deviations from expected norms*
 - *Become concerned if expectations violated*
- *Evaluate their own performance:*
 - *Feeling good if they have done well*
 - *Bad if they have not;*
 - *Have learned their parents' expectations for behavior—all these factors support the development of self-control (18 months to 3 years)*
 - *Only sees parents' faces, not his/her own!*

Developmental Tasks around Shame Modulation

- Parents' direct approval and disapproval, especially when accompanied by strong affects, supports internalization of parents' rules
 - Toddler tries to control his behavior in order to gain the parents' approval and avoid punishment (1-3 years)
- Beginnings of prosocial behavior:
 - Beginning capacity for empathy may cause toddlers to comfort distressed peers and
 - May help older toddlers inhibit aggressive impulses (18 months to 3 years)

Navigating Shame Processes

- Delineate difference between damaging core shame and appropriate shame
- SHAME—DISGUST—HUMILIATION (Core)
- Shame intensified with Toxic Stress leads to Safety Ethic
 - Which then leads to symptoms/lifestyles:
 - Grandiose
 - Narcissism
- Nurturing parenting required to prevent overwhelming experiences due to shame

Affective Processes and Shame

- Shame is a right-brain affective process
- Joyful experiences also related
- Appropriately balance and limit shame experiences
 - Work through shame by depending on positive affective processes
- Employ “Nesting” Strategies

Role of Joy & Intimacy

- Families must explore intimate expressions of joy
- Requires vulnerability to engage joyfully
 - Professionals as well as Parents at times
- Appropriately model navigation shame for parents
 - Using interpersonal skills (e.g. Joyful Interventions)

Empathy and Compassion

- *Shame and Emotional pain*
- *Shame and the “yuck” response*
- *Empathic awareness*
- *Withdrawal Risk*
- *Compassionate engagement.*