



Action **4** Child Protection

Making **Quality** Child Welfare
Practice **Possible**

WEBINAR TITLE:

Navigating Uncertainty and Supporting Our Children Through the COVID-19 Crisis:
COVID-19 and the Child's Experience

DESCRIPTION:

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched all of our lives. But, imagine the impact of this uncertain world on the life of a child – a child who has already experienced abuse and neglect and/or other trauma. Child welfare agency frontline workers, parents/caregivers, educators, and many others involved with critical social safety systems interact with children and must be able to deliver honest, developmentally appropriate, and transparent communication about the COVID-19 crisis, while maintaining awareness of the impact of the child's previous traumas.

This webinar will explore a child's perspective of their experience during the pandemic and potential trauma-responses and reactions to the changes experienced. Information presented will include thoughtful, nurturing, and practical ways caregivers can respond to support children and how these responses can increase a child's resilience.

RESOURCES:

- Navigating Uncertainty and Supporting Our Children Through the COVID-19 Crisis: Information and Practical Application

Contact Us:



704.845.2121



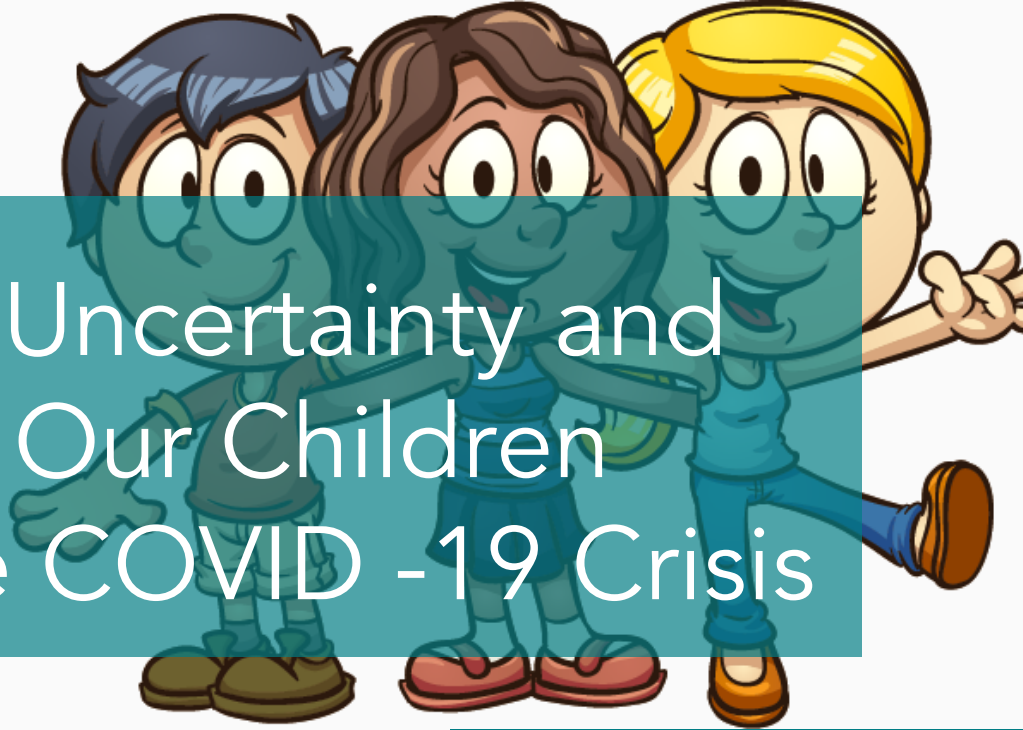
inquiries@action4cp.org



www.action4cp.org

MAY 2020

Navigating Uncertainty and Supporting Our Children through the COVID -19 Crisis



The COVID-19 pandemic has touched all of our lives. But, imagine the impact of this uncertain world on the life of a child – a child who has already experienced abuse and neglect and/or other trauma.

Child welfare agency frontline workers, parents/caregivers, educators, and many others involved with critical social safety systems interact with children and must be able to deliver honest, developmentally appropriate, and transparent communication about the COVID-19 crisis, while maintaining awareness of the impact of the child's previous trauma

Through a series of micro-learnings and webinars, we partner to share information that is both relevant and helpful to all those caring adults doing the best they can to support and strengthen the children and young people in their lives.

To discuss these materials or any of our learning sessions, please contact:

Lisa Ruiz-Lee, MS, Sr. Project Director

✉ Lisa.Ruiz-Lee@actionchildprotection.org

Lauren Wagner-Ortiz, LCSW, Sr. Staff Associate

✉ Lauren.Wagner-Ortiz@actionchildprotection.org

Lisa Durette, MD, DFAPA, DFAACAP

✉ Lisa.Durette@gmail.com

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Childhood Resilience: The ability to "bounce back" from stress, adversity, failure, challenges, or even trauma.

Emotional Dysregulation: Inability to control or regulate emotional responses to provocative stimuli.

Felt Safety: Arranging the environment and adjusting behaviors so children can feel they are safe in their home.

Hypervigilance: Continuously scanning the environment, searching for anything that could mean danger or pose a threat.

Stress: A status of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances.

Trauma Response: The response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope.

COVID-19 and the Child's Experience



FELT SAFETY OVERVIEW

Karen Purvis, co-creator of the therapeutic Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), used the terminology "felt safety" to describe the way in which a child, who has experienced trauma, experiences safety in their caregivers' home.

Felt safety is a feeling a child experiences (ie. they feel safe). Felt safety occurs when caregivers arrange the environment and adjust their behavior so that children can feel truly safe in their home.

The goal of felt safety is to reduce and minimize a child's fear response in their caregiver's home.

Purvis, K. B., Cross, D. R., & Sunshine, W. L. (2007). *The connected child: Bring hope and healing to your adoptive family*. New York: McGraw-Hill.ng



FEAR RESPONSE REACTIONS

When a child's fear response is in control, the child's focus is on:

- Personal Safety
- Hunger and thirst
- Escaping scary situations (physically and emotionally)
- Making hurt stop and go away (physically and emotionally)

A scared child can not grasp:

- Discussions, sermons, or lectures
- Complex reasoning, logic, or stories
- Philosophical discussions or abstract concepts

The brain's "fight, flight, or freeze" fear response can make a child:

- Run away and hide
- Lash out physically or verbally
- Get angry or cry
- Become unresponsive
- Try to control the situation

Tips and Tricks to Support Felt Safety



1 Provide Developmentally Appropriate Information:

Children need access to information they can understand and process. Access to this information will prevent them from thinking the situation is worse than it actually may be. This does not mean adults need to overshare or assume that children will fully understand the state of the current pandemic. The best approach is to provide information on a developmentally appropriate level. As a caregiver, it is also a good idea to monitor what your child is seeing and/or hearing on TV and social media. Listen to their questions carefully and respond to them in a reassuring way.

2 Create Calm Spaces:

Many children, especially those who have experienced trauma, also experience sensory overload or hypervigilance. To support them, you can empathize with them through facial gestures, body language, and calmly mirroring what they feel and generally accepting the expression of their feelings.

Another way to help children regulate is to provide a calm space, or “comfy corner,” in the home. This should be a comfortable place to sit, lay down, and relax. You can create this space for your child using objects you feel will help them feel secure. Blankets, stuffed animals, books, and pictures may all help to create a calm, soothing space.

3 Develop a Flexible Routine:

Predictability in a routine increases children's feelings of safety as it gives them an opportunity to prepare for the day, making it more successful. Utilize visuals of the routine or schedule throughout your home, and ask the child to participate in the development of those routines, giving them ownership and an appropriate amount of control. Place those visuals in several locations in your home, giving the child the opportunity to review when they feel necessary. When developing this routine, make it fun and flexible, leaving space for playful connectedness throughout the day.

Many children who have experienced trauma, such as severe neglect, have food insecurities. For traumatized children, using visuals to display meal time schedules and set out snacks, so children can visually see that food is available to them, may be helpful and reassuring.

“

STAY CALM

no matter what



SEE THE NEED

behind the behavior



MEET THE NEED

find a way”

~Dr. Karen Purvis

Tips and Tricks to Support Felt Safety



4 Connect:

There are many special ways to connect with your child. Engage with your child by interacting playfully, give them hugs or other touches that they are comfortable with, and use direct eye contact when talking with them.

Even when days are stressful, taking the time to connect with your child decreases that stress. Ask each of your children what would be fun to do together and then incorporate those specific activities into your schedule. Purposefully work to meet the individual, unique needs of your children.

5 Express Empathy:

Listen to your child with empathy and use active listening. Even if what they have to say is difficult for you to hear, listen without interrupting. Ways to help express empathy to your child include the following:

- Routinely ask open ended questions. Asking your child open-ended questions about how they are feeling and what they think about life and the world we live in provides them an opportunity to feel heard. Asking questions and incorporating children's feelings and thoughts into decision-making also creates buy-in and ownership, both of which help increase active, supportive participation.
- Pay attention and respond to the child's non-verbal cues.
- Convey you have heard and understand their feelings by validating them.

6 Create Social Opportunity:

Many children are missing friends and the activities they participated in prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While social distancing may be the norm for months to come, there are still many ways you can facilitate socialization for children. Some ideas for you to consider include:

- Maintain your support network. Help your child set up face-time or zoom calls to connect with family and friends. For younger children, consider these sessions as "play dates" and identify games and activities that might translate well across the virtual universe.
- Creatively celebrate special events and activities, social distance style. For example, drive by parades to celebrate birthdays and graduations will help children to see that good things still happen.
- Participate in remote school activities, if possible. Continuing to participate in school and educational programming helps children feel connected to the outside world.

“

TELL YOUR
CHILDREN

you are precious

you are valuable

NO ONE ELSE
IS CREATED
LIKE YOU”

~Dr. Karen Purvis

Playful Connectedness

FREEZE DANCE

Select a song that you can dance to. You can use your child's favorite song to increase engagement. Explain that when the music is on, it is time to dance and when you turn the music off, it's time to freeze. During the activity, make sure you are dancing with your child.



GUESS THAT LYRIC

This activity is great to use with children of all ages. Play part of a song of your choosing (use songs they like and know) and stop the song. Challenge your child to sing the next part of the song. This activity is fun, because older children can then challenge you!

“ PLAY
DISARMS FEAR
builds connectedness

TEACHES
SOCIAL SKILLS

behind the behavior

TEACHES
COMPETENCIES

for life ”

~Dr. Karen Purvis

BUBBLE JAMBOREE

To make any bubble blowing activity more interesting, instruct your child to pop the bubbles with different parts of their bodies during each round of bubble popping. They can use their elbows, feet, head, or do an “alligator chomp” with their arms to pop the bubbles.