

Healthy Families America and Peer Abuse Prevention: Understanding the Link Between Parent Child Bonding and Prevention of Subsequent Bullying

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This component of the Prevent Child Abuse America Bullying/Peer Abuse Prevention Toolkit describes how Healthy Families America promotes social emotional learning. It may open up new avenues for involvement in preventing peer abuse for interested members of the Prevent Child Abuse America network.



Bullying/Peer Abuse Prevention Tool Kit



OVERVIEW

THE ROLE OF HEALTHY FAMILIES AMERICA IN BULLYING PREVENTION



Mastery of social emotional learning skills is an essential element of bullying prevention.



The building blocks of social emotional learning are formed through healthy attachments.



Healthy attachments form when parents respond to their infant's needs so that the infant learns he/she can trust their caregiver to take care of them.



Research shows that Healthy Families America families form healthy attachments and have richer parent child interactions. A goal of Healthy Families America is that children go to school ready to learn and cooperate with their peers and teachers.

*What is **Social Emotional Learning?***

Social emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

www.casel.org

AVENUES OF INVOLVEMENT FOR THE PREVENT CHILD ABUSE AMERICA NETWORK

HEALTHY FAMILIES AMERICA IS ALREADY WORKING ON SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING WITH THE FAMILIES IT SERVES.

Schools benefit when children arrive at school with healthy attachments to their parents and an initial mastery of some of the SEL core competencies. These competencies will be reiterated throughout the school years.

When aligned with SEL principles, Healthy Families America provides an opportunity to forge partnerships with entities already working on bullying prevention.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THE FOLLOWING FAQ EXPLAINS THE RESEARCH AND PROVIDES MORE BACKGROUND ON THIS ISSUE FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED.

WHAT DO PEER ABUSE PREVENTION AND HEALTHY FAMILIES AMERICA HAVE IN COMMON?

Healthy Families America works with parents and babies. One focus is helping the caregiver increase their child's social emotional skills through fostering attachment, strengthening parent child interactions and helping parents make sure their child is ready for school. We know from 20 years of research that an important part of peer abuse prevention is fostering social emotional skills in children at school.

We know a child reads well when he/she arrives at school having heard a large vocabulary at home, been read to daily and had rich dialogue with her/his caregiver. Similarly, a child who arrives at school with a healthy attachment to his/her caregivers and whose caregivers understand the importance of parent-child interactions, will be better able to benefit from the social emotional learning that he/she will have at school. Further, his/her caregivers will also understand the importance of these lessons.

HOW CAN HFA PROGRAM MANAGERS GET INVOLVED?

HFA program managers can use this information to broaden their networks and deepen connections with the local school system by showing how the SEL taught in intensive home visitation can be built upon and reinforced in preschool and all subsequent schooling. Additionally, this aspect of HFA provides program managers with a larger pool of potential funders by making the connection between HFA, SEL and Bullying Prevention.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM FORTY YEARS OF RESEARCH TO PREVENT BULLYING?



Research on bullying prevention confirms that the best way to prevent bullying is to engage children, families, schools and communities. Within this ecological context, successful programs help children develop the social emotional learning (SEL) skills necessary to effectively manage themselves and their relationships with others. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five core SEL

competencies including: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.¹

What is CASEL?

CASEL is the nation's leading organization advancing the development of academic, social and emotional competence for all students. Learn more at www.casel.org

HOW MIGHT HEALTHY FAMILIES AMERICA ALSO PREVENT BULLYING IN SCHOOL?

Social emotional learning skills come from the attachment formed between parent and child. This first relationship serves as the foundation and model for all relationships that the child will have. Healthy Families America is a nationally recognized evidence-based, home visiting program that works with families prenatally or at birth, for up to five years. Home visitors promote parent child bonding and SEL through strategies specifically designed to develop and reinforce the parent's positive interactions with their infants and developmental guidance.² Proponents of SEL and Healthy Families America know emotional intelligence can be taught because a child's healthy development is influenced by the interaction of biology (genetics) and ecology (social and physical environment).³

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY ABOUT HOW HEALTHY FAMILIES AMERICA HELPS FAMILIES WITH SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

Families who participate in Healthy Families America show higher levels of healthy attachment, bonding and parent-child interaction. Research has found that:

"Mothers in the treatment group (people completing the program or in more than 36 months) were significantly more likely to read to their children than those in the program less than six months. Reading to children is an important interaction and bonding activity that has a positive impact on the child's development."⁴

"Overall, Healthy Families participants displayed greater sensitivity to their children's cues, greater understanding of their children's development, greater knowledge of alternative methods of discipline, and less overall distress and rigidity."⁵

"The largest long term rigorous study of HFA shows...increased positive learning behaviors (works and plays cooperatively, follows oral directions and rules and completes work on time) among children participating in the HFA program."⁶

These findings indicate that the building blocks for social emotional learning, attachment, parent-child interaction and school readiness are elements of the Healthy Families America.



WHAT HEALTHY FAMILIES AMERICA INTERACTIONS PROMOTE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

The CASEL has identified five core competencies. Healthy Families America promotes these competencies through a variety of interactions by the home visitor. This chart shows each competency and provides examples of how the Healthy Families America home visitor supports and enhances the parent and the child's emotional intelligence; thereby helping each child go to school ready to learn SEL and each parent has a better understanding of the importance of SEL.

SELF-AWARENESS	SELF-MANAGEMENT	SOCIAL AWARENESS	RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING
<p>Share information with parents that help them to recognize stressors.</p>	<p>Share stress management techniques and assist parents in their own physical and emotional regulation.</p>	<p>Increase parents' knowledge about infant cues and capacities.</p>	<p>Reinforce parental capacity to read and respond to infant cues.</p>	<p>Reinforce positive discipline by parents.</p>
<p>Assist parent in recognizing the role their own childhood experiences can play in their parenting. Increase a parent's emotional recognition.</p>	<p>Address challenging issues and promote healthy lifestyle behaviors.</p>	<p>Use a child development curriculum to share information with parents about appropriate child development milestones. This will result in anticipatory guidance.</p>	<p>Encourage both parents to become active in the lives of their children.</p>	<p>Promote proper nutrition and healthy habits for both parent and child.</p>
	<p>Help mothers establish a consistent prenatal care provider and encourage compliance with prenatal appointments and medical advice.</p>	<p>Share information with parents on positive discipline strategies.</p>	<p>Model appropriate relationships, creating a trusting, nurturing relationship with the family.</p>	<p>Share information with parents regarding prevention of child injuries, such as safe sleeping, fire safety, water safety, etc.</p>
	<p>Develop goal plans with parents and support parent in success.</p>		<p>Assess, address and promote positive parent-child interaction.</p>	<p>Ensure parent and child have a medical home and they utilize it.</p>

APPENDIX A:

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT ATTACHMENT AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

CAN PARENTS REALLY IMPACT THEIR BABY'S BRAIN DEVELOPMENT?

Yes. Attachment plays a primary role in the way a baby's brain organizes itself. Infants are born dependent upon their caregiver. A key part of attachment forms when parents help their baby regulate both physical and emotional needs in a timely and sensitive manner. Every time a parent responds to their child's need, every time a parent helps their child find the words to describe their feelings, they strengthen the neural pathways in the brain that allow children to understand how others feel. Studies of newborns mimicking adult behavior suggest that the human brain is pre-wired for empathy. Defined as "mirror neurons", the wiring allows babies to take the feelings inside of another and "mirror" it in themselves. Babies experience the feelings of someone else in the part of the brain known as the insula and the feeling goes down to the limbic area or the emotional core of the brain.⁷ Possessing the mirror neurons alone is not enough to develop empathy; the neurons must be nurtured through experience. Like all learning, the development of empathy is a developmental process and begins in the home. **Over time, our ability to interpret and respond meaningfully to the feelings of others is dependent on effective modeling of responsive care from parents.** Healthy Families America home visitors model and support parents in effectively modeling responsive care.

CAN PARENTS WITH HISTORIES OF TRAUMA BREAK THE CYCLE AND DEVELOP POSITIVE PARENTING?

How we come to terms with our own childhood experiences, significantly impacts the way we parent. "Science has shown that it is not what happened to you in the past that matters most in determining how you raise your children. Instead, it is how you have come to make sense of your early life experiences that is the most robust predictor of how your children will become attached to you."⁸ Becoming a parent opens a window in which parents hover between their own early childhood experiences and how they want to "be" as parents. Home visitors use many techniques to help parents reflect on their past experiences and adopt new strategies to provide safe, predictable environments for their children. For parents who did not receive a nurturing childhood, providing that environment may not come naturally. Through ongoing home visits, Healthy Families America home visitors guide parents in how to: interpret their baby's signals, become attuned to their needs and overcome automatic, potentially destructive responses based on past experiences.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FAMILIES GRADUATE FROM HEALTHY FAMILIES AMERICA?

When babies receive responsive caring from their caregiver, they learn about pro-social behavior long before they learn the words to describe this behavior. Having experienced empathy at home, these children have acquired the foundational social emotional skills necessary to thrive in school and community settings. Beginning in pre-school and continuing throughout the school age years, these concepts must be reinforced both through continuing nurturing caregiving and using developmentally appropriate curriculums for both children and the adults who come into contact with them. Emotional intelligence, the result of SEL, is an essential tool in ensuring the healthy development of children and the prevention of peer abuse/bullying.

¹ <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies>

² www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org

³ Shonkoff, J.P. & Garner, A.S. (2011). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*.

Brackett, M.A. & Rivers, S.E. (2014). Preventing bullying with emotional intelligence. *Education Week*.

⁴ Healthy Families Florida Evaluation Report, January 1, 1999-December 31, 2003, p.112, Prepared by Williams, Stern & Associates, Feb. 2005.

⁵ Galano, J., Huntington, L., Healthy Families Virginia Executive Summary Statewide Evaluation Report, FY2000-2004, p.13, prepared for Prevent Child Abuse Virginia.

⁶ HFA Impacts on Children, Healthy Families America,

http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/downloads/hfa_impact_children.pdf

⁷ Iacoboni, M. (2009). Imitation, empathy, and mirror neurons. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 653-670.

⁸ Siegel, D.J. & Hartzell, M. (2004).