



Silver Springs – Martin Luther School

The Silver Springs Model of Trauma Recovery and Resilience for Children and Adolescents

Key Elements In Our Therapeutic-Teaching Community

******Orientation For New Staff******

Our model draws upon the work of several leaders in the field of trauma, resilience and bullying prevention (including Sandra Bloom, Jan Hindman, John Briere, Bonnie Benard, William Voors, Barbara Trout and others).

Trauma Recovery:

Helping Children Who Have Been Hurt

By The Adults Who Were

Supposed To Take Good Care Of Them

Creating and maintaining a quality “therapeutic teaching community” that promotes recovery from trauma and resilience for children is an on-going process. We continuously seek to modify and improve our program model as we learn more about the children we serve and the strategies that are most likely to make positive differences in their lives.

Our model of Trauma Recovery Treatment includes thirteen (13) key elements. These elements consist of *shared definitions and assumptions* and *what they mean for us* in our work as treatment and teaching people. Some of these elements have long been part of the Silver Springs treatment model, others are more recent additions.

The thirteen (13) key elements are:

1. We will have a shared definition of “*trauma*”.
2. We will have a shared understanding that all behaviors, no matter how disgusting and hurtful, were at one time “*needed by*” and “*useful to*” a child.
3. We will understand that “*safety*” must be the top priority.
4. We will understand that “*justice*” and “*fairness*” are more important than traditional affection for many children.
5. We will understand that the children we serve have been “*injured*”; they are not “sick, evil, lazy, or crazy”.
6. We will understand that every child has the potential to be “*resilient*”, to overcome adversity and live a happy, productive life.
7. We will have a common understanding of how to help children overcome their “*learned helplessness*”, a result of their traumatic experiences.
8. We will use a shared strategy related to the use of “*touch*” by us that is meant to be affectionate.
9. We will use a shared strategy related to the use of “*touch*” by us that is meant to be corrective or to assure safety.
10. We will have a commitment to not *re-creating the experience of trauma and injury* for children in our care.
11. We will create a culture where “*reporting*” is valued, and “tattling” is not.
12. We will understand the nature of “*hypersensitivity*” among children who have been injured and experienced trauma.
13. We will *not give up*; we will make every minute with each child count.

1. Trauma is....

feeling afraid, unsafe, unprotected and in danger because of bad, sad and scary things that have happened,

AND

feeling helpless and unable to do anything about the bad, sad and scary things that are happening,

AND

waiting for the next bad, sad or scary thing to happen.

For many children, the “**anticipation**”, the “**waiting**”, for the hurtful experience to occur is more terrifying than the actual experience of abuse or injury. From the child’s perspective, once the actual experience of abuse or violence begins, the feeling of terror decreases because the child knows, based on past experiences, that eventually the abuse will end.

“Waiting”, on the other hand, can go on for days and days and has no definite end.

Children who are stuck in this “waiting for bad things to happen” place

cannot

trust,

or learn,

or practice new skills,

or have fun,

or be a kid.

Trauma is not an event.....trauma is a feeling and then a behavioral reaction to that feeling.

2. Children can feel afraid and unprotected **even when they are perfectly safe with the adults who are taking good care of them.**

Why is that? *Because they have strong memories of the bad, sad and scary things,*

AND

even every day things can remind them of the awful awful things that happened to them,

AND

they are always expecting something else bad to happen to them.

3. **You have to know the details** of the bad, sad and scary things that happened to the children with whom you are working.

4. As you learn about a child who will be coming into the program,

DO NOT ASK: What is wrong with this child?

DO ASK: **What has happened to this child?**

5. As the children in your care do dangerous and hurtful things around you and to you,

DO NOT ASK: What is wrong with this child?

DO ASK: **What has happened to this child?**

The treatment/teaching people need to assume that each child is doing the best she or he can with the resources and skills available to them at that moment.

6. How does feeling terrified, unprotected and helpless hurt a child's health and development?
- a. The child ***constantly watches*** to see who will hurt them next—so he or she can't concentrate on "being a kid" or school work or any regular things.
 - b. The child misreads people's facial expressions, body movements and words so he or she ***sees danger where there is none*** or ***fails to see danger*** even when it closes in on them.
 - c. The child or adolescent is at ***greater risk*** for:
 - feeling depressed and trying to hurt or kill him/herself
 - smoking cigarettes.
 - overeating and becoming obese
 - overusing or becoming addicted to alcohol and other drugs
 - catching a sexually transmitted disease
 - becoming pregnant or getting someone pregnant as a teenager
 - having a panic disorder
 - being unable to get a good night's sleep
 - acting without thinking
 - d. The child becomes ***afraid of his or her own feelings***, so s/he figures out ways to "not feel the scary feelings". These ways include cutting on themselves, using drugs, hurting other people before they can be hurt, and disassociation—being spaced out, not paying attention to what is happening now.
 - e. The child ***can't feel sorry for anyone else***. He or she can't understand or pay attention to anyone else's feelings.
 - f. The child becomes ***suspicious*** of kindness and "love".
 - g. The child develops ***obnoxious and dangerous behaviors*** that bother everyone else but ***serve some purpose*** for the terrified child.

How can the helping adults help a child recover from trauma?

1. *The adults should help the child feel safe when he or she is safe.*

Here's how:

1. The adults must know each child's triggers or reminders of bad, sad and scary experiences.
2. Ask the question, "Does anything about me remind you of the bad or scary things that have happened to you?"
3. Ask the question, "Does anything about other staff or our program remind you of the bad or scary things that have happened to you?"
4. When the child says "Yes", the adults help the child understand that he or she is safe now. Encourage the child to continue to tell you when he or she is reminded of scary things.
5. The adult often says, "You are safe here."
6. The adult often asks, "Do you feel safe right now?"
7. Especially when a child begins to look angry or agitated, the adult asks "Do you feel safe right now?"
8. The adult often asks, "What can I do to help you feel safe now?"
9. For all of these questions, **the adults listen to the answers and take some action.**

Examples:

A child tells you she is afraid someone could come in the window at night.

A child says that you remind him of the man who molested him.

A child says that white rice reminds him of his mother who beat him.

A child tells you that she does not feel safe going outside in her neighborhood.

Remember that dangerous and aggressive and hurtful behaviors are an attempt by the child to communicate with us.

2. *When a child is in an unsafe situation, the adults move in to protect the child and to create safety for the child.*

Here's how:

1. The adults first recognize what "unsafe" means to the child.
2. The adults **change the child's environment** so that the child can feel safe.
3. The adults have to help the child be and feel safe in these areas of his or her life:

body
feelings
thoughts
things

4. If a child's possessions are stolen or destroyed, replace them.
5. If a child is hit or beaten up by another child, make sure someone says "I'm sorry" and that it does not happen again.
6. When a child shares his or her thoughts, no matter what they are, **do not shame or blame**. Rather, listen and offer a different thought when needed.

**3. *The adults help the child keep the memories of the terrible things that have happened to him or her but without the terrifying feelings.
Forgetting is not possible.***

Here's how:

1. The adults make sure the child has lots of times and ways to talk with safe adults about the sad and scary things that have happened to him or her. These talks may be with you or in therapy or with other trusted adults.
2. The adults do not encourage the child to "forget about what happened".
It is not possible or healthy to forget.
3. The adults read "therapeutic books" with the child.

4. *The adults will understand that even obnoxious, disgusting and dangerous behaviors were at one time useful to the child.*

Here's how:

1. The adults know that when people feel terrified, we stop thinking and we start behaving in ways **TO SURVIVE**.
2. The 3 reactions that human beings have that help us survive dangerous situations are:
 - * Fight---to fight back as if our lives depended on it
 - * Flight--to run away fast as if our lives depended on it
 - * Freeze or hide--to stop talking, stop moving, and to disappear if at all possible, as if our lives depended on it.
3. The adults need to react to disgusting behaviors in ways that are never **SHAMING OR BLAMING**.
4. The adult says to the child something like "You must be really scared right now. I will keep you safe. What do you need from me so that you will feel safe again?"

5. *The adults will understand that some behaviors are still useful to a child.*

Here's how:

1. The adults will recognize the "Get away from me I'm terrified" behaviors and will back up a bit.
2. The adults will recognize the "Come close to me I'm terrified " behaviors and will move in closer.
3. The adults will recognize when a child is creating an emergency situation in order to have contact with his or her parent or loved one. Whenever possible, the adult will prevent a child from having to create these emergencies by trying to arrange regular contact. When regular contact simply is not going to occur, the adult helps the child come to accept the fact that.....

"The child has a parent whom they can love but they cannot count on."

6. *The adults will understand that “justice” and fairness are more important than affection for kids who have been treated unfairly.*

Here’s how:

1. When a child yells the words "That's not fair", the adults will look at the situation from the child's point of view.
2. When the adult has spent days, weeks and months "being fair", and the child still yells "That's not fair", the adult will not shame or blame the child. The adult will tell the child that so much unfairness has happened to them that you know he cannot always tell when someone is being fair. But you are here to help him with that.
3. When first getting to know a child, focus more on being "fair" than on being "nice."

7. *The adults will learn what kinds of physical touch are OK for a child EACH DAY. The adults will never assume that a touch that is ok to a child one day will be ok the next day also.*

WHY does this matter? "Touch" to children who have been badly hurt does not mean the same thing to them as touch means to people who have not been hurt.

Here’s how:

1. The adult must ask the child about what kinds of touch are ok each day.
2. The adult must respect the child's answer.
3. The adult must understand that even if a child says "ok" to a hug, he or she may not want a hug but is afraid to say so.
4. The adult must never say to the child, "I need a hug today."
5. The adults will create "Privacy Rules" that set clear expectations about touch and dress and privacy.
6. Through these strategies, the adult is **returning the control of a child's body TO THE CHILD, WHERE IT BELONGS.**

8. The adult will help the child understand the difference between “tattling” and “reporting”.

Here’s how:

1. **Tattling** is when a child tells you something in order to get someone else in trouble.
2. **Reporting** is when a child tells you something so that he or someone else will be safe.
3. Well-meaning adults often confuse the two and then miss important things that a child is trying to tell us.
4. So the adults need to listen to the whole story the child is telling before deciding whether it is a tattle or a report.
5. Encourage kids to report things to you when they see that something unsafe is happening to them or someone else.
6. Children who have grown up in families with violence, addiction, and danger have learned these survival rules:

Don't talk. Don't feel. Don't trust. Don't deal.

If a child is not talking with you or sharing feelings, then he or she probably is using their survival rules on you.

9. The adults will be careful to avoid doing things that re-traumatize a child.....things that result in the child feeling terrified and unsafe again.

Here’s how:

1. Ask the child whether you or other staff remind the child of other people who have hurt them.
2. The adults will realize that for many children.....

**Loud voices have been followed by physical violence.
Loud voices can trigger a flashback of terror within a child.**

3. So the helping adults will use quiet voices that do not sound angry, shaming, blaming or **LOUD**.
4. The adults will understand that the child will try to draw you into their hurtful, violent patterns. The wise helping adults will recognize this and not fall into these traps.

10. *The helping adults will understand that the children are watching our every movement and listening to our every word to see when (not whether) we will become dangerous to them.*

Here's how:

1. The adults will be direct and honest in their communication with the child---never shaming or blaming.
2. The adults will not whisper with one another about the child.
3. The adults will not make hand gestures to one another about the child, assuming that the child will not notice or understand them.

11. *The adults will help the children deal with the terrible sad losses in their lives.*

Here's how:

1. Identify everything that a child has lost.
2. Let the child grieve. Read therapeutic books with the child. Help the child have little rituals to say good bye to the people and things s/he has lost.
3. Don't discount the small things that a child has lost----even a pencil or a pair of socks.

12. *The adults will help the child unlearn his or her “learned helplessness” (“I can’t do it.....”).*

Here's how:

1. Tell the child that he or she does have influence over what happens to him or her.
2. Help the child learn that the world can be a safe place where the adults take good care of them.
3. Be forever patient in our work with children. Realize that a child may need MANY experiences of encouragement, teaching and reassuring before he or she is willing to risk failing yet again.
4. Continuously label for the child when he or she successfully “gets or earns what they want or need” as a result of positive, non-hurtful actions.
5. Continuously point out the connections between the child’s behaviors and the consequences of daily living.

13. *The adults will help the children create a hopeful future for themselves.*

Here's how:

1. Ask the child what they want to be when they grow up.
2. Notice what the child does well or enjoys doing and comment on how the child could do that as an adult.
3. Ask the child where s/he wants to live when they grow up, what kind of car they want to drive, what kind of house they want to live in.
4. Create opportunities for the child to help others within the program and within the community.
5. Create opportunities for the child to try out new skills that could become a future job or career (typing class, cooking class, fixing hair, teaching others, studying the stars,

14. Even though the helping adults use all these ideas plus lots more, there still will be times when the children act in ways that are angry, hurtful, sad, and afraid.

Just keep reminding yourselves that these children have been hurt very badly in their lives, and we are here to help them recover from those hurts.

Even in the middle of horrible behavior, remind yourself that these children have been "injured". They are not sick, damaged, evil, or bad.

Remember to ask yourselves the question:

"What in the world happened to this child to make him or her behave this way?"

Remember that behind every aggressive act is a frightened child.

***HAVE FUN and LAUGH WITH THESE
LITTLE PEOPLE WHO HAVE
BEEN THROUGH SO MUCH
SADNESS BEFORE FINDING
THE GIFT OF YOU!!!***

Thank
you
for
being
part
of
the
Silver Springs –Martin Luther School
journey
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