

Caring for Children and Youth in Crisis: Using Evidence to Support Trauma Informed Approaches to Healing in Afterschool

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On Thursday, October 1, 2020, the Afterschool Alliance, in partnership with [The Readiness Projects](#), hosted [the first webinar](#) in a three-part series focused on the why and how of implementing trauma-informed approaches in afterschool programs. The first webinar in this series provided an overview of what we know about the effects of adversity on child and adolescent brain development, with an eye toward why trauma-informed practices are so important. This document provides high-level takeaways from the webinar, along with related resources.

Key Takeaways:

- **Context matters:** Only 10% of the 20,000 genes in the human genome are expressed in any individual in their lifetime and brain chemistry changes based on context. When trust, safety, and healthy relationships are broken, we become stressed, producing cortisol. While a little bit of stress is okay, persistently high levels of stress without a buffer (like the presence of a calm and trusted adult) cause people to get locked into a condition of persistent stress. In situations of prolonged stress, cortisol can harm the brain. Oxytocin influences the same structures in the brain as cortisol and can protect the brain from cortisol's damaging effects. *Relationships and trust increase oxytocin, protecting children from cortisol and providing a buffer from the negative effects of stress.*
- **Afterschool settings cultivate relationships with caring adults:** Central to positive [developmental relationships](#) is consistency, and "creating the web" for young people to be surrounded by multiple caring adults who know and value them. Afterschool programs provide access to networks of caring adults that are able to build and sustain these developmental relationships: a recent survey of youth by the Search Institute found that children and youth in OST programs generally have stronger developmental relationships with OST staff than students do with adults in their schools.

*"THERE IS NO SEPARATION OF
NATURE AND NURTURE...
ONLY THE COLLABORATION
BETWEEN THEM."
— PAMELA CANTOR*

Key Terms

- *Context is the primary determinant of which genes are expressed – it is the driver of who we become.*
- *Genes are chemical followers that are triggered into expression by our context – our environments, experiences, and relationships.*
- *Epigenetics is the study of the factors and processes that influence what our genes do and how they are expressed.*
- *Cortisol and oxytocin are hormones that the body produces in response to context – cortisol in response to stress, oxytocin in response to love and trust.*

- **The effects of trauma can be reversed:** Using trauma and related terms can establish a deficit orientation. People who have experienced trauma need to know that it can be fixed, without additional trauma or stigma. The brain is a dynamic living structure that can recover from trauma – it is electric and the fuel for brain development comes from experiences and relationships.
- **Whole child development requires a [New Three R's](#):**
 - **Relationships:** The science tells us that relationships are the **active ingredient** in the learning environment, and the antidote to toxic stress.
 - **Routines:** The brain is a predictive machine, and is calm when things are orderly, making routines and consistency vital pieces of environments that encourage brain development.
 - **Resilience:** The key to building resilience is recognizing that we all – adults and youth alike – have strengths to build upon. Asset-based approaches allow us to help them understand and manage their emotions.
- **Intentionality drives outcomes:** Afterschool and other youth development programs can create opportunities for all 3R's. But now is the time to take what the field has done naturally and bring more specificity and intentionality to it, to optimize what afterschool programs and staff do naturally. (More on the practice of trauma-informed approaches in the next webinar!)

“THE WORDS OF THE DAY ARE ‘INTENTIONAL’ AND ‘EXPLICIT.’” – KAREN PITTMAN

Resources:

- [Turnaround for Children's Curated List of Resources for this Webinar](#) (Password: context)
- [Turnaround for Children's Five Non-Negotiables for Whole Child Design](#)
- [Turnaround for Children's Resources for the Three Rs: Relationships, Routines, and Resilience](#)
- [Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework](#)
- [Search Institute's 4 S's Interview](#)
- [Readiness Projects Blog Post - Disruption Creates Opportunity: We Must Do Better Together](#)
- [Readiness Projects Homepage](#)

Upcoming Webinar:

On Tuesday, October 13, 2020, the Afterschool Alliance and the Readiness Projects will host the [second webinar in the series](#). In this webinar, the speakers will dive into the implications of the research presented in the first webinar. The speakers will provide concrete examples of how programs are ensuring or can ensure that they are providing safe and supportive environments that are centered on healing.

Speakers:

- **Shawn Ginwright**, Founder and CEO, Flourish Agenda, Inc.
- **Ebony Grace**, Chief Operating Officer, NJSACC
- **Salma Villarreal**, Program, Community, and Engagement Coordinator, ourBRIDGE for KIDS
- **Deborah Moroney**, Managing Director, American Institutes for Research (Moderator)