

KINS Community Comment 6-10-15

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Infant mental health. What is it? Is it even possible to *do* therapy with an infant?

Well, it most certainly *is* possible. I'm a licensed marriage and family therapist who has been in practice 12 years, and just over half of my current caseload involves children age 5 and younger.

That fact might shock some listeners, but research shows that the more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely that child will be able to recover from trauma and thrive. It also means that a child is less likely to have more significant mental illness later on in life. The old adage is true: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Infants rely on their first relationships to be nurturing and caring, in order for their social-emotional development to have a secure foundation. If every infant was born into a family that loved, fed, bathed and changed their diaper consistently ...perhaps the field wouldn't be expanding so rapidly as it is.

But the sad truth of the matter is that many infants are *not* born into this type scenario. The Center for Youth Development recently released a data report called *A Hidden Crisis: Findings on Adverse Childhood Experiences in California*. Adverse childhood experiences, or ACES, are traumatic experiences—such as abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, drug use, and parental separation or divorce—that have a profound impact on a child's developing brain and body. The more ACES a child has, the more lasting impact on their overall health and livelihood throughout their lifetime.

Humboldt County tied in second place with Mendocino County for the highest percentage of adult residents having experienced at least one ACE in their early childhood. That's over 75% of people in Humboldt! This is 10-15% higher than the most populated counties like Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino. This is something to not only take note of, but to actively do something to repair the damage being done to our children and grandchildren.

Humboldt is unique in that we already have established the 0-8 Mental Health Collaborative, a multidisciplinary group formed to support the early intervention work being done in our community. The collaborative is committed to providing free and low-cost trainings to develop a more trauma-informed and trauma-responsive workforce.

If you know of a child who has experienced ACES and it's impacting their functioning at home, daycare, or school, there are several points of entry for services in Humboldt. If there are developmental concerns, refer to Redwood Coast Regional Center's Early Start program. If you have academic concerns, Special Beginnings through Humboldt County Office of Education would be something to look into. If you know a child who has emotional, behavioral, or social concerns, you can refer them to Changing Tides Family Services, where I specialize in children birth to 3. Call 444-8293 for more information.

This has been Jeannie Campbell for Community Comment.