Child Care and Early Education for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: Research-to-Policy Resources

As evidence of the damaging developmental consequences of toxic stress in early childhood continues to grow (Harvard University, Center for the Developing Child), researchers and policymakers have turned their attention to trauma as a key source of toxic stress. A recent brief published by the U.S. Administration for Children in Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) funded NITR (Network of Infant Toddler Researchers), defines trauma as “witnessing or experiencing an event that poses a real or perceived threat” (Harden, 2015, p. 1). The Florida State University, Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, defines trauma as “an event that is unpredictable, produces a feeling of helplessness, and overwhelms one’s capacity to cope.”

Trauma is a multidimensional concept: a traumatic event can be one-time or recurring; trauma can be single-faceted or complex, consisting of multiple, simultaneous traumatic events (Harden, 2015, p. 2). Examples of trauma include: witnessing or directly experiencing community or family violence, including physical and sexual abuse; separation from caregivers; neglect, including physical or medical neglect; other forms of maltreatment; serious illness; war; natural disasters; and accidents (Harden, 2015, p. 2). Infants and toddlers are particularly vulnerable to maltreatment. More than a quarter of maltreatment victims are under three years old, and rates of victimization are 2.3 percent for infants and 1.1 percent for toddlers (Mortensen & Barnett, 2016).

The harmful impacts of trauma in early childhood can be severe and enduring. Neurological changes occur in children that experience trauma. These hinder their cognitive and socioemotional development (Perry & Conners-Burrow, 2016). Children who experience maltreatment or are exposed to violence are more likely “to experience poor developmental and academic outcomes, high rates of high school dropout, criminal involvement, incarceration, and various mental health issues including depression, psychiatric disorders, and substance dependency” (Dinehart, Katz, Manfred, & Ullery, 2013, p.284). Such is the importance of addressing the harms caused by trauma that a number of agencies within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services collaborated on the development of a Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Human Services.
This *Research-to-Policy Resource List* identifies resources in the *Research Connections* collection published in the past 10 years that examine the role child care and early education can play in both preventing traumatic experiences and in supporting children who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing trauma. The resources on this list have been assigned to the following categories: research reviews, programs, interventions/curricula/trainings, systems, policies, and access.

**Research Reviews**
The following resources review research literature on the role of child care and early education in supporting children experiencing or at risk of experiencing trauma.


**Programs**
A number of studies have examined how different child care and early education programs can either prevent trauma or influence the outcomes of children experiencing or at risk of experiencing trauma.

*Early Head Start*


---

1 The list does not include resources on homelessness as a source of trauma because *Research Connections* published a resource list on child care and early education for children experiencing homelessness in July 2015.
**Head Start**


**Child Care and Other Early Education Programs**


Interventions/Curricula/Trainings
The following studies examine curricula, interventions, or trainings that can be implemented within child care and early education programs and that focus on preventing trauma or addressing the needs of children who experience or are at risk of experiencing trauma.


Systems
The following resources explore systems-level partnerships between child care and early education services and the child welfare system.


**Policies**
The following resource examines variations in state Child Care and Development Fund policies for children and families in the child welfare system.


**Access**
These studies explore issues related to accessing and using child care and early education programs for children and families experiencing or at risk of experiencing trauma.


