

# Preventing Child Abuse by Supporting Parents:

How to recognize parenting styles that place  
children at risk.

CTAAP Webinar

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March 14, 2013

# Objectives

- Review an ecological model for risk factors for child abuse including child, parent, family and community level risk factors.
- Understand four parenting styles that may put children at risk for abuse
- Consider other red flags that may present in the primary care practice that could suggest child abuse
- Review the parenting support programs available in the state of Connecticut.

# Ecological Risk Model

Child	Parent	Family	Community
Unwanted	Mother < 19 years at child's birth	Family violence	Poverty
Disabled (including behavioral, learning, emotional disability)	Substance abuse	Family isolation	Unemployment
Multiple	Mental illness	Single parent	Community violence
Preterm	Developmental delay	Many children under 5 years of age	Residential flux
	Abuse in childhood	Household flux	

# Risky Parenting Styles

- Developmentally inappropriate expectations of children
- Empathy failure
- Placing inherent value on physical punishment
- Parental role reversal

– Bavolek, OJJDP Justice Bulletin 2000

# Inappropriate parental expectations of children

- These parents expect more from their children than it is developmentally appropriate to expect.
- Expecting a newborn not to cry, an infant to be toilet trained at 6-12 months.
- Children feel worthless and disappointing-> toxic stress.
- A set-up for possible abuse.

# Lack of empathy toward children's needs

- Parents have an inability to be empathetic to children's needs and to respond to those needs appropriately.
- A parent must understand the state of mind of a child without being able to experience the child's feelings.
- Parents place a high premium on being "good" and acting "right."

# Parental value of physical punishment

- Believe children should not be “given into” or “get away with anything.”
- Believe children must be made to “respect authority.”
- Often use physical punishment for behavior for which they were physically punished themselves: confers the value of traditional family authority.

# Physical Punishment (PP) Data

- Parents are more likely to use PP when they are angry or irritable, depressed, fatigued, and stressed.
- The more children are hit, the more anger they report as adults, the more they hit their own children when they are parents, the more likely they are to approve of hitting and to actually hit their spouses, and the greater their marital conflict.

Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health,  
Pediatrics, 1998



# Physical Punishment (PP) Data

- Actions causing pain such as spanking can acquire a positive value rather than the intended negative value. Children who expect pain may actually seek it through escalating misbehaviors.
- Parents who spank are more likely to use other forms of corporal punishment and a greater variety of verbal and other punitive methods.
- When punishment fails, parents who rely on it tend to increase the intensity of its use rather than to change strategies.
  - Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Pediatrics, 1998

# Parental Role Reversal

- Children are expected to be sensitive to their parents' needs and responsible for much of their happiness.
- Parent behaves as a needy child who looks to children to provide comfort and support.
- Quickly learn that the early stages of parenting are about giving, not taking, and disappointment ensues.

# Attachment: another red flag

- Secure versus insecure attachment between parent and child.
- A very helpful frame to assess parenting and recognize need for support/intervention.
- <http://www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/pdfs/pubpres/SupportingHealthyRelationships.pdf>

# Secure Attachment

“Secure attachment is characterized by the child’s ability to use his or her parent as a source of comfort and a “secure base” from which to explore. A key principle of attachment theory is that dependence leads to independence. In other words, it is only when a child feels confident in his parent’s availability that he can fully explore and play on his own.”

- <http://www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/pdfs/pubpres/SupportingHealthyRelationships.pdf>

# Parent behaviors: secure

- Sensitive and responsive care
- Clear, consistent, developmentally appropriate expectations and supervision
- Warm, positive, and responsive verbal interaction
- Seeing the child as a unique individual, having insight into the child (i.e., why he does what he does)
- “Holding the child in mind” (i.e., awareness of and ability to reflect on the parent’s own feelings and responses to the child)

# Child behaviors: secure

- Comfort exploring in presence of an attachment figure
- When hurt, going to an attachment figure for comfort (i.e., not a stranger)
- Seeking help when needed
- Willingness to comply with requests with minimal conflict
- No pattern of controlling or directing the behavior of caregivers (no role reversal)

# Insecure attachment

- Insecure-resistant attachment: children are overly dependent, expressing difficulty with separation and with independent play.
- Insecure-avoidant attachment: children are under-dependent, seeming disengaged from the parent and barely noticing them upon separation.
- Disorganized/disoriented attachment: children who seem frightened or disorganized in the presence of their parents.

# Parent behavior: insecure

- Interfering with the child's attempts at exploration (i.e., intrusive, overly controlling)
- Unclear, inconsistent, developmentally inappropriate expectations and supervision
- Ignoring the child's needs and cues
- Inconsistent, unreliable responsiveness
- Hostile, threatening, and frightening behaviors
- Prioritizing the parent's needs over the child's (i.e., self-absorbed)
- Behaving like a child or treating the child as though he/she is in charge (i.e., role-reversal)
- Marked withdrawal, fright, hesitation or timidity around the child
- Sexualized or overly intimate behavior



# Child behavior: insecure

- Excessive dependence
- Marked shyness, withdrawal, or unfriendliness
- Failure to seek contact, comfort when needed
- Indiscriminate friendliness or contact seeking
- Punitive, bossy behaviors
- Over-concern with the parent's well-being (i.e., role reversal)
- Disoriented or frightened in presence of the parent, such as approaching while looking away, stilling, freezing, or rocking
- Promiscuous, sexualized behavior

# Parenting Support in CT

- Triple P
- The Nurturing Families Network
- Child FIRST
- The Child Development Infoline
- Circle of Security Parenting

# The Triple P: Positive Parenting Program

- Evidence-based
- Practical strategies for parents
- DCF is currently converting other parenting support programs over to this evidence-based model
- About 10 sessions to build positive parenting skills
- Specialized programs: teens, divorce, disability

# The Triple P Aims

- Put evidence-based parenting into the hands of parents across the world
- Normalize the concept of parenting programs so parents feel comfortable asking for help
- Deliver the exact amount of support a parent needs – enough but not too much
- Give parents the confidence and skills to be self-sufficient -- to manage problems independently
- Provide communities with population-level early intervention to prevent child abuse, mental illness and anti-social behavior.

# The Triple P Website

[www.triplep.net](http://www.triplep.net)

# The Nurturing Families Network

- Run by the Children's Trust Fund
- Offered in 33 centers throughout the state
- Voluntary program for first time, at-risk parents
- Home visiting, parenting groups, community connections
- Prenatal, antenatal and postnatal referral

# Child FIRST

- Intensive, early childhood, home visiting intervention Connecticut's most vulnerable young children (prenatal to age six years) and their families.
- The goal is to identify children at the earliest possible time to decrease emotional and behavioral problems, developmental and learning problems, and abuse and neglect.
- Eventually there will be a Child FIRST program covering each of the DCF areas.

# Child FIRST Website

[www.childfirst.net](http://www.childfirst.net)



# Child Development Infoline

- A wealth of parenting support programs are listed.
- [http://www.211ct.org/referweb/  
Subcategory.aspx?;;0;;N;  
0;1890521;PARENTING%20EDUCATION  
%20AND%20SUPPORT](http://www.211ct.org/referweb/Subcategory.aspx?;;0;;N;0;1890521;PARENTING%20EDUCATION%20AND%20SUPPORT)
- 1-800-505-7000

# Circle of Security Parenting

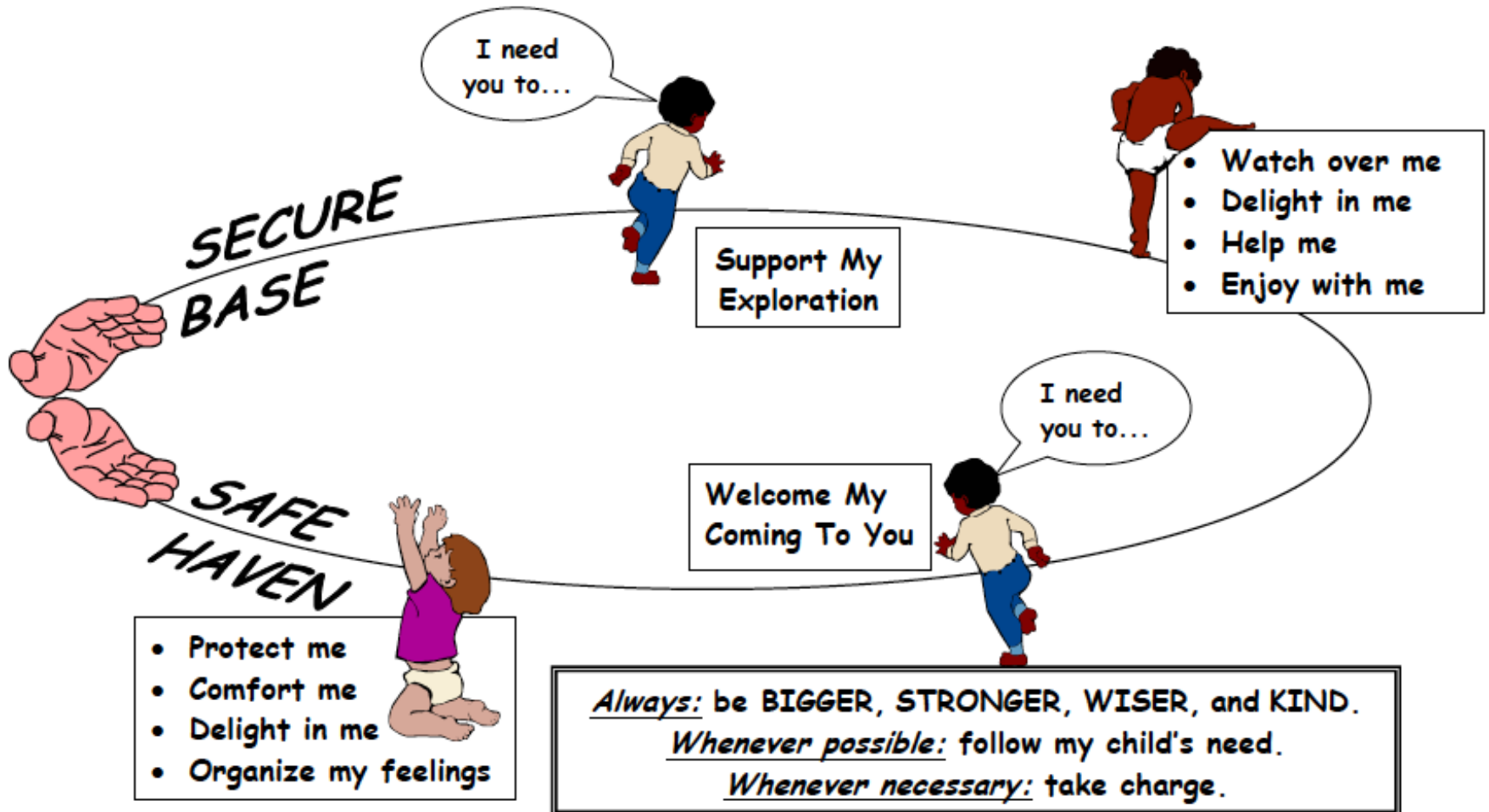
- Relationship based program (8 session DVD) designed to enhance attachment security between parent and child.
- Helps build parents and caregivers' capabilities to view young children's behavior from a secure base and safe haven perspective and then identify the children's need, both of which are crucial to helping young children develop a secure attachment pattern.

# Circle of Security Parenting

- Helps parents improve the quality of their relationship with their child, which, in turn, strengthens and repairs the child's foundation for their future development.
- Website: [www.circleofsecurity.net](http://www.circleofsecurity.net)

# CIRCLE OF SECURITY

PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS



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# Questions?

