



Head Start School Intervention Project



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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With gratitude, we acknowledge the use of other published material in the inception of ideas and the development of activities contained in the curriculum. Activities taken from other publications are cited throughout the curriculum. Acknowledged material includes, but is not limited to:

- Thomas Achenbach, Child Behavior Checklist (2001).
- Sandra Bloom, Creating Sanctuary (1997).
- John Briere, Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (2005).
- Julian Ford, TARGET (April, 2005).
- Jeanne Gibbs, TRIBES (2001).
- Richard Kagen, Rebuilding Attachments with Traumatized Children (2004).
- Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A., The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun (2003)
- Carl III Literacy Consultation

Full citations and publication information can be found in the bibliography.

This curriculum is a modified version of the SW Michigan Children's Trauma Assessment Center School Intervention Curriculum funded through a grant through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (Atchison, Blashill, Black-Pond, Hyter, Henry, Sloane).

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## Head Start School Intervention Project

### Introduction

Young children exposed to violence are at risk for multiple neurodevelopmental deficits (Henry, Sloane, Black-Pond, in press). Relational, behavioral, emotional, and academic difficulties frequently occur for such children (Schore, 2001, 2003; Stein, Jaycox, Kataoka, Wong, Tu, Elliot & Fink, 2003; van der kolk, 2005). When young children are continually exposed to violence, either through direct or indirect exposure, they are also likely to experience a chronic stress state, which tends to over-develop certain regions of the brain involved in anxiety and fear responses, and often results in the under-development of other regions of the brain, such as those involved in complex thought, and those necessary for learning (Schore, 1997). Children ages 3-6 are frequently exposed, for the first time, to other environments which challenge their ability to process information and relate to others. These environments are frequently pre-academic settings that have great potential to intervene and enhance development of essential skills due to their developmentally specific services, a critical factor in providing services to children exposed to violence.

The Southwest Michigan Children's Trauma Assessment Center provides assessment and advocacy services for traumatized children. Transdisciplinary team members (Ben Atchison, Connie Black-Pond, Mary Blashill, James Henry, Yvette Hyter, Mark Sloane) developed a classroom curriculum based on five core elements necessary for the personal, social and academic success of traumatized children (funded through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency). The current School Intervention Project Curriculum has been adapted to meet the needs of a preschool population. These adaptations and subsequent evaluation are funded through a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, under the Safe Start initiative.



**Feeling Safe:** Safety is foundational to all the other core elements. Students who do not experience safety usually have great difficulty regulating stress and their emotions. Structure provides needed boundaries and consistent expectations so that children can learn to trust those responsible for their environment. The curriculum is designed to build a level of safety and calm which is necessary for learning to occur.



**Making and Keeping Friends:** Relational difficulties are pervasive for children exposed to violence. Children initially are suspicious of friendships and nurturing. Over time through repetition and consistency children learn that adults can care for them without hurting them. Children learn different ways to communicate what they are feeling. Problems can be avoided, minimized, or solved through good communication nurtured within relationships.



**Calming my mind and body:** Students exposed to violence often have difficulty in regulating their emotions and behavior. Their hyper alertness and sensitivity to changes within the environment increases the likelihood of dramatic "fight, flight, or freeze" behaviors which they are unaware of. The curriculum emphasizes the building and practicing of calming strategies for both students and teachers.



## Head Start School Intervention Project



**Feeling Good about Learning:** Students who feel safe, are able to regulate their own emotions, and have the support of school staff when they are struggling are more likely to have positive academic outcomes. The willingness of teachers to support young children who appear resistant to learning creates new opportunities for students to be excited about what they are learning.



**Making Meaning of My Experiences:** Young children may develop the belief that all environments are unsafe because of their exposure to violence. Children must have experiences of caring and nurturing to counter these preexisting perceptions that reality is always dangerous. When school staff are safe, children learn that some adults can be trusted. Such school experiences help students make sense out of social interactions, traumatic events, and adult interactions in a much different way.



**Literacy:** There is a strong link between childhood trauma experiences and ongoing developmental delays in language processing (Madison, Johnson, Seikel, Arnold & Schultheis, 1998; Bland, Stewart, Seymore, Beeghly & Frank, 1998). Mastery of language processing skills such as phonology, print knowledge and oral language is necessary for strong reading comprehension and decoding skills (Justice, 2005). Research suggests that delays in these skills widen over time without early intervention/prevention (Karoly, Kilburn, Cannon 2005). Frustration over academic demands is likely to lead to increased social/emotional difficulties.

With these core elements foundational to the SIP curriculum, five units were designed: Learning about School (weeks 1-4), Learning about Self (weeks 5-11), Learning about Community (weeks 12-16), Learning about Friendship (weeks 17-22), and Saying Goodbye (weeks 23-26). Each unit has structured activities to create new opportunities for learning in the students by developing both social/emotional competency and literacy. Literacy development is an important component of the curriculum because it targets academic skill deficiency, which historically has been problematic for young children exposed to violence. Enhancing student literacy through a multifaceted approach that emphasizes improving social-emotional competency due to exposure to violence will enhance academic opportunities for success.

Each activity, within the five units, is uniformly formatted. The overarching goal of each activity is specifically described. The targeted core elements are indicated. Instructions for conducting the activity are detailed. The “key points” remind staff of the potential challenges that may occur when children are exposed to the activity. Alternative staff strategies to precipitate student participation are outlined. The activity protocol also includes a professional development worksheet (Plan/Do/Study/Act) that encourages staff to create an intervention plan, detail action steps, and detail what action steps could be taken, with the possible outcomes.



Head Start School Intervention Project  
**Classroom Environment: Treasure Hunt**

**Goal of activity:** Children exposed to violence are often hypervigilant to changes in the environment. This activity helps children to gain a sense of predictability, which will create safety in the classroom.

**Approximate length of activity: 10 – 15 minutes**

**Materials:** 15-20 identical shapes (star, circle, square, letter) cut out of paper, cardboard, etc

**Instructional Procedures: Whole Group**

- The teacher/aide will hide identical cut out shapes around the room for each child
- The teacher will introduce the word “treasure” as a new vocabulary word.
- **“Today we are going to look for treasure. Treasure means something special”**
- The teacher will show the students an example of what they will be looking for.
- **“Here is a treasure -an orange star”**
- The teacher will model searching for the treasure and show where the treasure was found.
- **“See if you can search for your own orange star”**
- The teacher will invite students to search for their own treasure.
- **“See if you can search for your own treasure – an orange star”**
- Students will be invited to share where they found their treasure.
- **“Where did you find your treasure – the orange star”**
- Repeat this activity several times throughout the year and when new students arrive.



Feeling Good about Learning



Feeling Safe



Calming My Body and Mind

 <p><b>KEY POINTS</b> – Signs of anxiety</p> <p><b><u>Hesitation to explore on their own</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow children to observe others searching.</li> <li>○ Partner up – encourage another child to help this child find object.</li> <li>○ Work directly with that student to help find the object.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Taking objects from others</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work directly with that student to help find objects and increase their possibility for success.</li> <li>○ Label objects with students’ names.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>LITERACY TIPS</b></p> <p><b><u>Oral Language</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read a book about “treasure” and explain that the word treasure means something special.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Phonology</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hide a treasure that begins with the letter of the week. Tell students they will be looking for a star and the first sound in star is “s”.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Print Knowledge</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Label the object with: the child’s name, the name of the object or both (i.e. Jacob’s Star).</li> <li>○ Encourage students to show others the shape with their name on it – “These letters tell us that this is Ariyana’s treasure.”</li> </ul>
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Head Start School Intervention Project

**Classroom Environment: I Spy – Peer Facts Box**

**Goal of activity:** Children exposed to violence may have difficulty with peer relationships. This activity creates an opportunity to learn about others.

**Approximate length of activity: 10 – 15 minutes**

**Materials:** Note cards with a list of general characteristics (gender, eye color, shirt color) general pictures of clues, container for clues

**Instructional Procedures: Small Group or Whole Group**

- The teacher/aide will show a picture of each characteristic (see attached)
- The teacher/aide will then read one to two clues about each characteristic (listed above).
- The teacher/aide will post a picture of each characteristic for the children to see.
- The teacher/aide will encourage children to look at themselves to figure out if the clue fits with their own characteristics.

**“If you have brown hair just like the color in this picture then you can sit/stand”**

- The teacher/aide will encourage children to observe the characteristics of other children.
- “I see someone with a blue shirt. \_\_\_\_\_ has a blue shirt just like this picture”**



Feeling Good about Learning



Making and Keeping Friends



Making Meaning of Experiences

 <p><b>KEY POINTS – Signs of anxiety</b></p> <p><b><u>Does not speak when called upon</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow the child to observe others taking part in the activity</li> <li>○ Allow children to call out guesses, with teacher help to restate these guesses as needed so that others can hear</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Does not appear to understand the activity</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Slow the pace of the activity</li> <li>○ Use fewer characteristics</li> <li>○ Begin with easier characteristics and move to more difficult</li> <li>○ Talk about who is eliminated with each characteristic</li> <li>○ Ask children who are eliminated to sit or stand to provide more visual input</li> </ul>	 <p><b>LITERACY TIPS</b></p> <p><b><u>Oral Language</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introduce new vocabulary: sweater, sweatshirt, boots, tennis shoes, etc.</li> <li>○ Allow time for and encourage children to describe their own characteristics: “Tell us about the color of your shirt.”</li> <li>○ Expand on child’s response: “Your blue sweatshirt looks very warm.”</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Phonology</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use the sound in a child’s name as a characteristic: “I’m looking for someone whose name starts with the sound ‘s’ ”.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Print Knowledge</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Label cards with both a picture and the name of the characteristic: Blue Shirt. Point out the name as it is read aloud.</li> </ul>
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Head Start School Intervention Project  
**Classroom Community: Interactive Storytelling**

**Goal of activity:** Children exposed to violence often have difficulty organizing and expressing themselves. This activity fosters literacy skills, narrative cohesion and sequencing skills.

**Approximate length of activity: 10- 15 minutes.**

**Materials:** Simple short stories with prominent words and pictures.

**Instructional Procedures: Small Group**

- The teacher/aide will introduce the story and use prompts to encourage interaction and engagement from the students.
- The teacher/aide will use some of the following prompts
  - Completion: *“The bear ate all of the...?”*
  - Recall: *“Did Goldilocks break the chair?”* or *“Who broke the chair?”*
  - Open Ended: *“Tell me about the Papa Bear.”*
  - W – Prompts: *“Where was goldilocks sleeping?”* *“What did Papa Bear say?”*
  - Distancing: *“Tell me about a time you were afraid.”*
- At the end of the book, encourage the students to share if they enjoyed the book or not.

Dr. Grover Whitehurst – Dialogic Reading (1994)



Feeling Good about Learning



Making Meaning of My Experiences

 <p><b>KEY POINTS</b></p> <p><b><u>Difficulty attending to the story.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ask simpler questions to the younger students and more complex questions to the older students</li> <li>○ If they answer incorrectly, expand the answer for them in a positive manner.</li> <li>○ Ask direct questions using a positive calm voice and by saying the child’s name, before asking a question.</li> <li>○ Ignore distracted behaviors that are not disruptive to the story.</li> <li>○ Work in smaller groups during choice time – offer interactive reading as a choice activity.</li> <li>○ Repeat the story several times and allow children to practice “reading” the story to each other.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>LITERACY TIPS</b></p> <p><b><u>Oral Language</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Model the use of complete sentences by expanding on one-word utterances: “Yes, Goldilocks was sleeping in the baby’s bear’s bed.”</li> <li>○ Invite the students to act out the story with puppets/felt board and model the use of dialogue.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Phonology</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Choose a story that has a character or title that includes the letter of the week.</li> <li>○ Point out the sounds in a character’s name – Dora has the sound “d”, “o”, “r”, “a”. Choose 3-4 sound words.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Print Knowledge</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Point out the words as they are read.</li> <li>○ Choose books with fewer words per page so students associate the words with pictures.</li> </ul>
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Head Start School Intervention Project

**Following Directions: Simple Simon Says**

**Goal of activity:** Children exposed to violence may have difficulty with planning, organizational skills, and attention. This activity provides opportunities for children to develop these skills.

**Approximate length of activity: 10 – 15 minutes**

**Materials:** An open area in the room

**Instructional Procedures: Whole Group**

- The teacher/aide will explain that this is a game about:
  - Listening with our ears
  - Watching with our eyes
  - Moving our bodies
- The teacher/aide will describe and demonstrate simple movements
  - Bend your elbow      Happy face
  - Touch your ear        Sad face
  - Touch your toe        Tap foot hard
  - Hands on hips         Tap foot soft
- Children will try to copy these movements by looking and listening.



Feeling Good about Learning



Calming My Body and Mind

 <p><b>KEY POINTS</b> – Attention difficulties</p> <p><b><u>Not participating</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow the child to observe others.</li> <li>○ Children who are learning the English language may need more time to observe.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Bumping into others/poor body control</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mark off sections on the floor for each student to have own space.</li> <li>○ Use carpet squares to mark personal space.</li> <li>○ Include additional instructions that require lifting and carrying heavy things (books, chairs).</li> </ul>	 <p><b>LITERACY TIPS</b></p> <p><b><u>Oral Language</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Model a movement and ask students to name or describe the movement: bending knee, touch toes etc.</li> <li>○ Model and include instructions to greet your neighbor by saying hello, good afternoon etc. Introduce neighbor as a new vocabulary word and explain that a neighbor is the person standing next to you.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Phonology</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Instruct students to whisper the sound of the letter of the week – show the letter and say the name of the letter while students make the sound.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Print Knowledge</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Instruct students to trace the letter of the week in the air.</li> <li>○ Trace the letters in your name.</li> </ul>
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Head Start School Intervention Project

**Self and Emotion: Emotion Matching – Calm/Scared**

**Goal of activity:** Children exposed to violence often have difficulty identifying emotional states. This activity allows students to match facial expressions with various experiences.

**Approximate length of activity: 10 – 15 minutes**

**Materials:** Pictures of faces with Calm or Scared/Excited expressions, pictures of different calming or exciting/scary scenes.

**Instructional Procedures: Small Group or Individual**

- The teacher/aide will explain the activity to the student, and show an example. “Does this person look calm or scared?” “He’s making a face that makes me think he’s scared.” “What kinds of things make you feel scared/like making a face like this?”
- The students will then work together to begin to match the face pictures with the scenes.
- The children can join and leave the group as they wish during this choice time activity.



Feeling Safe



Calming My Body and Mind



Making Meaning of My Experiences

 <p><b>KEY POINTS – Signs of anxiety</b></p> <p><b><u>Unable to express safely or don’t know</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow children to observe others matching cards.</li> <li>○ Partner up – encourage another child to help this child find matches.</li> <li>○ Work directly with that student to help find a match.</li> <li>○ Share experiences from the classroom that might make kids happy/sad.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Talking about a sad thing that happened</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow the child to talk, offering support while not asking for more information.</li> <li>○ Talk to the School Interventionist if the event the child describes suggests current danger.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>LITERACY TIPS</b></p> <p><b><u>Oral Language</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use probing questions to encourage the use of more complex sentences: “Tell me about when you are scared?” “Who makes you feel calm at your house?” “How do they make you feel calm/safe?”</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Phonology</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Model the sound at the beginning or end of the emotion word: “c” is the first sound in calm, or “m” is the last sound in calm.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Print Knowledge</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Label each emotion with the word. Read the word aloud and explain that the letters on the card, the pictures on the card and word you read all tell the same thing.</li> <li>○ Encourage children to match the words as well as the emotion picture.</li> </ul>
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Head Start School Intervention Project

**People and Places: Dramatic Play – Police Station**

**Goal of activity:** Children exposed to violence may be fearful of the police. Previous trauma may be triggered because of police involvement. This activity will allow a child to experience interactions, which introduce the role of the police in maintaining safety in the community.

**Approximate length of activity: 10 – 15 minutes**

**Materials:** Props - pretend police car/car, paper, pen, police hat, uniform, sunglasses, desk, and phone

**Instructional Procedures:**

- The teacher/aide will work directly with 3-4 students in dramatic play area.
- The teacher/aide will use the script provided to generate interactions that will develop new vocabulary and model effective social communication skills.
- The teacher/aide will follow the child’s lead – adding comments to expand child’s thoughts and utterances and asking questions to gain more information.
- Students may take turns playing various roles: police officer, victim, robber, etc.



Feeling Good about Learning



Feeling Safe



Making Meaning of My Experiences



**KEY POINTS** – Anxiety triggered by previous exposure to violence

**No talking during the pretend play**

- Allow time for the children to get comfortable with the new activity.
- Ask the children questions, beginning with yes/no questions, then proceeding to more complex questions like, “What can I do to help keep you safe?”
- Model the appropriate responses to questions with other students to help other children gain a better knowledge of appropriate interactions.

**Dysregulation**

- Use a soft calming voice.
- Model slow, relaxed breathing.
- Assist child in moving to another activity in the room.
- Use active listening to encourage child to talk about fear of police.

**“You look pretty frightened, sometimes thinking about the police can make people feel scared.”**



**LITERACY TIPS**

**Oral Language**

- Encourage the use of more complex sentences by asking probing questions and expanding on one word answers.

**Phonology**

- Encourage students to find items in the dramatic play area that begin with the sound of the letter of the week.

**Print Knowledge**

- Include writing materials in each dramatic play area: a clipboard for an office, pad of paper for grocery lists or writing tickets, pads of paper for school etc.



Head Start School Intervention Project  
**Appendix B: Calming Strategies**

Keep the specific child and their interests in mind:

Music and Movement – kid songs – especially those that require “listen and move” –  
Greg and Steve, Hap Hapwell (Spanish), Raffi  
Simon Says, Body Rock, A Walking We Will Go

I Spy – objects in the room or a student can look through a preschool I Spy book in a space away from others

I Hear – An adult can guide the student/s through a game by describing the sounds in the room and helping children to identify them

I Feel – An adult can guide the student/s through a game by describing the rough feel of the carpet, the smooth feel of the table, the soft feel of a sweater or the tickly feeling of fingers running on an arm

Simon Says

Warm/Cool Cloth – guiding child through the sensation of cold/warm

Touch – gentle touch on the shoulders or hands

Soft Music

Scented Lotion – Try out smells with child first

Clapping Pattern – simple pattern for child to copy

A space away from others to: read a book, play a small matching game (prepare 3-5 matching pieces in a bag), sorting toys (legos, Barbie shoes, blocks) into matching colored cups, drawing with crayons or markers

Texture Box: sort through the textures: sandpaper, satin, fleece, cotton balls, etc

Cutting Box – kids scissors and old newspapers or mail

Deep Breathing – helping child to be aware of breathing by holding a hand on chest or stomach and listening for breaths