Developmental friendliness of emergency housing: Brightening spaces and supporting parenting for infants and young children

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Acknowledgments

University partners:
- Villanova University
- University of Rutgers-Camden
- University of Delaware
- University of Minnesota

Community partners:
- Ileen Henderson – Bright Horizons
- Office of Homeless Services
- People’s Emergency Center
- Philadelphia Family Shelters (many)
- Children Workgroup – Early Childhood Committee

Funders:
- William Penn Foundation
- National Science Foundation

Families experiencing homelessness
- Public Health Management Corporation
- Cloudburst Consulting Group
Overview

Risk and resilience perspective

Developmentally appropriate spaces in shelters
- Philadelphia “BELL Project”
- Bright Spaces program

My Baby’s First Teacher parenting intervention in shelters
- Program introduction
- Research evaluation

Risk and Resilience in Development

Children develop in the context of other systems
- Family
- Neighborhood/Community
- Broader social, economic, and political conditions

Risk factors threaten healthy development

Protective factors can mitigate the impacts of risks

Understanding what enables some children to succeed despite adversity informs efforts to intervene with others at risk
Resilience and Protection

Many children and families function well despite homelessness

Protective factors across levels:
- Child
- Parents/Family
- Community
- Policy and social service systems

Developmentally Appropriate Spaces

Building Early Links for Learning (BELL)
- Community collaborative endeavor with many partners
- People’s Emergency Center, Office of Homeless Services, PHMC, Cloudburst Consulting, etc.

- Goals:
  - Enhance developmental friendliness of shelters
  - Increase enrollment in high quality early education

- Funded by the William Penn Foundation
Developmentally Appropriate Spaces

Emergency housing as a temporary home for young children

- Safe places to play and explore
- Family routines and relationships
- Connections to community
- Model of developmental appropriateness for the family’s next residence
Developmentally Friendly Spaces

- Health & Safety
- Wellness & Development
- Workforce Standards & Training
- Programming
- Food & Nutrition

What is Philadelphia doing well?

**Space for Families:**
- Dining

**Supporting family connections:**
- Public benefits
- Accommodate ECE schedules

**Safety:**
- Immunizations
- CPR training
- Visitation
- Food safety
Where does Philadelphia need support?

Greatest variability
What improvements were requested?

- **Infants:**
  - Tummy time
  - Breastfeeding

- **Toddlers/Preschool**
  - Furniture
  - Toys

- **Safety**
  - Outlet covers
  - Cabinet Locks
  - Toilet Locks
  - Mirrors
  - Building maintenance

- **Admin./Building**
  - Bulletin boards
  - Lamination

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Trainings Requested

**Effects of homelessness on child development**

**Adverse drug and allergic reactions**

**Ongoing needs:**
- CPR
- Trauma informed care
Before

After
Bright Spaces® program

- Signature Program of Bright Horizons Foundation for children since 1998
- Over 300 in USA and 50 International
- Trauma Informed play and family spaces and rooms in a variety of at-risk settings
- Early Childhood professionals volunteer
- 18 Bright Spaces in Philadelphia

Multi-Faceted Portal to Support Kids and Families

- Staff Development
- Facilitate ECE partnerships to agencies
- Connectors
- Opportunity to utilize Self-Assessment Tool
- Focus of Children’s Program and Parent Education
- MBFT
My Baby’s First Teacher®

A parenting intervention designed for mothers and their infants experiencing homelessness

History and Program Development
My Baby’s First Teacher

Overview

Intervention Content

• Brain Development- The Importance of the First Year
• Tummy Time- How and Why
• Oral Motor Development- Early Vocalization, Articulation and Verbal Volley
• Quality of Touch- Physical Closeness and Massage
• Cause and Effect-Scientific Mind, Why crawling is Important, What is spoiling?
Growing Up Fast

- Developmental expectations are not in line with physical capabilities
  (e.g. potty training infant)
- Crawling Is Not Valued
  Walking appears to show advanced ability and is valued
Tummy Time: Why and How

Why Not do Tummy Time?

Confusion about “Back To Sleep”
“I’ve been told … my mother didn’t tell me but I overhead that you can’t put the baby on the stomach that it was dangerous. Like … and I was being careful.”

Babies Don’t Like Their Bellies
“I put him on his belly one time but he just cried. I don’t think it’s comfortable for him.”

Shelter life makes tummy time hard
“No sometimes… I’m always moving, especially around here. He’s either sitting up or laying down or in the crib. I have other children, and him”
Why Tummy Time?

After the class, 93% could give a reason why they put their babies on their bellies.

“And they also taught us different ways to do it. They don’t have to just be on the bed or on a mat to do Tummy Time. We could be at the doctor office waiting. They can be on our lap; on diaper table… like it just show different ways…”

“To get Tummy Time is important because it gives him exercise. It gives time to be on his own and explore.”

“I enjoy the fact that I can lay him down and feel confident enough that he’s on something that eventually he’s going to be able to look at really and like pick this up and look at the mirror.”
"I love my new blanket. I bring it everywhere and she loves it..."

Oral Motor and Language Development
“When I learned about letting them put safe things in their mouths I thought it will help people to stop being so quick to say “no” to the baby, instead of letting them explore. “

“It kind of actually reminded me a little bit, because I have a five year old and, I was going to be like ‘no’, but then I had to think, just to keep stuff around for him to be able to explore.”
Physical Closeness and Touch

Infant Massage

Wearing Front Carriers

Massage Was the Most Popular Lesson

“Oh the baby massage. I didn’t think it would be like that, because every time they got rubbed, I got emotional. I really felt like ‘this is my baby’!”

“My favorite lesson was the massage because it was about the baby bonding and being able to trust me and relate to me.”
Getting Babies Out Of Strollers

“The back pack that you put the baby in is awesome. I have three of them but the one that they gave us, the BabyBjorn one, it is the only one I wear because … the others are so uncomfortable but that one- I have worn it like four times since I got it… He loves it”

“Let me tell you, you see how he is? I have gone to the point where I wear it in the apartment; put him in it so I don’t have to keep holding him. I can just strap him to me, so he can walk around and be with me, and he loves that.”

Cause and Effect

• Many moms didn’t use the language but the cause and effect toy (push and go turtle) was the most popular
• Moms used the toy, observed their children’s play and enjoyed teaching them how to make it go
• Need to use more accessible language and clear, practical examples
Helping Children to Problem Solve

• The things they gave really helped my daughter. Especially like the push toys… and it was a little turtle … and I can help her with learning how to push it in different ways and learn how to work them; She just beat up on it to make it do something; but now it’s like with the toys, I show her how to do it. … this is how you got to push on this…

Program Infrastructure

• Baby’s under 1
• Pregnant Moms
• Dad’s anytime
• Facilitator Familiarity with Materials
• Agency Overview and Support
• Parent has Alone Time with New Baby
• High Quality Gifts to Moms
• Earn Diploma
• Celebrate Diploma
Core Concepts and Goals

- Bonding
- Hand’s On
- Increased Early Experiences
- Concrete tools
- Proactive
- Inexpensive
- Increased Staff Training
- Overall Agency Awareness
Knowing your Baby

“Well right now I’m trying there is a new thing where I’m noticing she’s not really crying whether there’s tears or whether it’s something wrong. I noticed and then there is more of whine and before I used to pick her up all the time. Now I’m noticing it could be something small as she wants another toy.”

• “Well, now I know how to calm her down. I know her likes and dislikes, I know now that she has her own personality. So I’m learning a whole lot about her. And she is her own little person. She is teaching me certain stuff.”

Other Issues- Spoiling

• Needs further study
• Mothers had very strong feelings
• First time moms felt better about 'holding baby as needed'
• Moms of multiples felt strongly against too much holding
Take-A ways for Good Practice

• Mothers enjoyed the group setting
• Mothers appreciated the hands-on approach to parenting class—having their baby with them without other children
• There is confusion about the safety of Tummy Time
• Mothers more likely to try new behaviors if they understand the reasons for changing behavior
• First time mothers are open to new ideas and information

Next Steps

• Bright Spaces program is sponsoring MBFT at selected Bright Spaces across USA (12 Programs to date)
• Janette Herbers Research

www.mybabysfirstteacher.com
Resilience and Protection

Many children and families function well despite homelessness

Protective factors across levels:
- Child
- Parents/Family
- Community
- Policy and social service systems
Developmental Screening

Philadelphia shelter sample

N = 75, ages 0-2

Risk for below average scores increases with age

Herbers et al., in preparation

Infants and Toddlers

Philadelphia shelter sample

N = 75, ages 0-2

Mothers responded to ASQ-SE

Herbers et al., in preparation
Parents at Risk

88% ethnic minority, 74% unemployed, 33% did not complete high school, 64% were teens when first child born

On average, reported histories of 5.6 stressful/traumatic life events
- Most endorsed include: death of close family member; previous homeless experiences; divorce/separation of parents; victim of violence; lived in foster home

Nearly half (45%) reported clinical levels of internalizing distress (symptoms of anxiety and depression) within the past 2 weeks

Parent-Child Relationship

Parenting Attitudes Risk

Herbers et al., in preparation
Parent-infant relationships

Most recent study:
- N = 45 children ages birth-12 months
- Recruited with their mothers while in emergency housing (3 shelters)
- Longitudinal (2 time points)

- Preliminary evaluation of MBFT parenting intervention
  - Randomized by round at each shelter
  - n = 14 (58% of eligible) received the intervention
  - Analyses based on “intent to treat”

Assessments include:

- Parent-child relationship
  - Self-report by parents
  - Observation of parent and child interaction

- Early childhood developmental screeners

- History of risks and stressful experiences

- Parent mental health
  - Internalizing/distress symptoms
  - Parenting stress

- Social Support
Descriptive Information

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Parenting stress linked to children’s developmental well-being
Social support and stressful experiences linked to parent distress...

Parent distress predicts less positive parent-child interactions

PRE-TEST:

POST-TEST:

N = 45
$\chi^2(\text{df}) = 5.471(5), p = .361; \text{RMSEA} = .046, \text{CFI} = .973, \text{TLI} = .952$
Next Steps

- Experimental design - evaluation of MBFT parenting program for infants
  - Larger sample, random assignment by family
- Expand basic research on infants in shelter
- Housed comparison group

Summary

Preliminary evidence that My Baby’s First Teacher parenting intervention promotes positive parent-child relationships during emergency shelter stay

Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool can assist housing providers in evaluating and improving the developmental appropriateness of shelter spaces for young children

Building protective factors at levels of child, family, and broader environment can bolster potential for resilience in young children experiencing homelessness