



center for
CHILDREN & YOUTH
JUSTICE

News from Supporting Early Connections

Fall 2010 2009



Seeing the Impact

Dear Friend,

In the past decade, research has shown that early relationships with stable caregivers are essential to children's brain development and future academic and social success. For infants and toddlers who experience neglectful or abusive parenting, or who are exposed to trauma, this critical relationship is often disrupted, putting them at-risk for serious, life-long problems.

Since May 2008, CCYJ and our partners in Supporting Early Connections have created an innovative model for fostering healthy early relationships and addressing the challenges facing very young children in the child welfare system. In our third year, we are starting to see the real impact of this work on babies, families and the system. We have enrolled 38 babies and their biological parents in Child Parent Psychotherapy with Navos. Professionals across the court, child welfare and mental health systems have trained and worked together to develop a common understanding and new ways to share information about the children we serve.

Here is what some of our partners have to say about the impact of SEC.

"Cases involved in SEC are resolving faster. Because everyone gets the same information about how the family is doing in treatment and what their strengths are, children are returning home sooner. And it's by agreement of all parties, we're not having to go into court to fight about it."

Dorry Peterson, Parents' Attorney

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SEC graduates Tony and Angela Gobroski and SEC Program Manager, Kelly-Warner King, appeared on King5's New Day Northwest to talk about how SEC reunited their family.

[Click here to watch the video.](#)

Quote of the Month

"Those who do not have an opportunity to form a secure attachment with a trusted adult (i.e., infants and toddlers who experience multiple foster homes) suffer grave consequences. Their development can deteriorate, resulting in delays in cognition and learning, relationship dysfunction, difficulty expressing emotions, and future mental health disorders."

Infants, toddlers and child welfare. ZERO TO THREE Policy Center Fact Sheet, July 2004, p.3.

"Because of the training provided by SEC, I think about cases differently than I did before. When I have a family with an infant or toddler in my courtroom, I ask more questions about placement and visitation. I'm thinking about what we can do to help the relationship between the child and the parent."

Commissioner Richard Gallaher

As we continue to gather more treatment and child welfare outcome data, we'll have even more to say about the effects of this important project. I look forward to sharing it with you.

Kelly Warner-King
SEC Project Coordinator

Riding with Strangers: A Baby's Perspective

By: Dawn Stolworthy, SEC Family Support Specialist

In working with children, we know from Dr. Bruce Perry and others that routine and consistency is very important for them to make sense of their world. Perhaps it is even more important for foster children whose routines are often disrupted and inconsistent. As much as possible, having the same person transport the child each week helps them to feel a little more stable and settled.

One of my jobs as a Family Support Specialist is to provide transportation to and from therapy sessions for some of the infants and toddlers in Supporting Early Connections. I want to make sure I am treating each infant and toddler as an individual person with different wants and needs, rather than as a package to deliver from point A to point B. Keeping in mind that the most important relationship to strengthen is that of the biological parent, foster parent, or caregiver, I work towards building a healthy relationship with the children I transport. I feel that these relationships only help to improve their future relationships with other special people in their lives because they learn that some adults are safe, loving, and nurturing.

For each child, I try to find out what specifically helps them to make their transition, which I discover by getting to know them better over time. Some of things I have come up with to help

children transition from one location to the next are:

- a transitional object, such as a blanket and/or stuffed animal
- soothing music
- water in a sippy cup, if old enough
- sun visor to block the sun
- binky, if appropriate
- toys, especially objects that shake, make noise, or are fun to suck on

Transitional Object

One boy was very anxious when I first started providing his transportation. He would cry a lot when I picked him up from daycare to take him to see his parents. I began bringing a fuzzy blue blanket with me into daycare and wrapping him up in it before leaving. I also had a stuffed horse in his car seat waiting for him, which he would pick up and hug through most of our ride together. He came to rely on these two objects to help him adjust from one setting to another, and would always look for them in my car.

Interacting with the Child

I talk to the children I am transporting if they are awake, and explain to them where we are going, even if I don't think they are old enough to understand yet. Children understand a lot before they can actually verbalize, and I want to help them understand that I am not taking them away from, but bringing them to their special people. I also sing, talk about things outside the car, play games with them if they are older (ex. where is your nose? What do you see out the window?). It also helps to decrease their anxiety, especially at the start of transportation when they don't know who I am yet.

A little girl that I transported would see her mom using her cell phone during sessions. Mom would sometimes let the girl hold it up to her ear and they would pretend to call each other. This interaction and phone play occurred so often that I decided to get a play phone for my car and for their sessions together. During our car ride, she would hold the phone up to her ear and "call mom." I would give her words such as, "Hi mom! I'm coming to see you! I love you, bye-bye." This seemed especially helpful when the mother was not able to come to therapy. The little girl would hold the phone up to her ear and talk to her mom. Even if mom didn't show up, she was able to make some small contact with mom in order to hold her in her mind until the next week's session.

SEC: Expanding Treatment Capacity

As the Supporting Early Connections project approaches capacity, the need for more infant mental health services in South King County has become clear. As a result of the early success of SEC, Navos, our mental health partner, received a one-year grant from the Stuart Foundation to begin developing a community of care for infants/toddlers and their families involved in the child welfare and dependency court system in South King County.

To accomplish this, Navos' experienced SEC infant mental health therapists partnered with therapists at the following community mental health providers:

- Auburn Youth Resources
- Kent Youth and Family Services
- Renton Area Youth and Family Services

- Valley Cities Counseling & Consultation

Navos provides training, mentorship, and support. Partner agency therapists each work with two families to provide weekly infant mental health training sessions. Navos and partner agency therapists also participate in a Reflective Consultation Group to discuss their cases and infant mental health clinical issues.

Navos is also working closely with each of the agencies to help develop the necessary administrative support for a sustainable infant mental health program, including training on Medicaid reimbursement and grant funding.

Supporting Relationships When Babies and Parents Live Apart

When an infant or toddler is placed in foster care, the child's relationship with his/her parent is disrupted. The Court then takes responsibility for the child's well-being, and determines the amount of contact the child and parent have. The following tips for working with young children in out-of-home-care come from the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health's recent publication "Supporting Relationships for Infants and Toddlers with Two Homes" (2010).

- Meeting the schedule of visitations not only fulfills the court's requirements but helps the infant/toddler keep the biological parent in mind.
- Consider the foster parent an ally, not a competitor.
- Visitations are not solely a reward for the parent; they must also meet the needs of the infant/toddler.
- Visitations will generally take place in a community setting. Having a blanket or stuffed animal go back and forth with the infant or toddler provides a sense of continuity.
- If visitations can take place in the foster home, this provides an opportunity to observe the infant/toddler's normal routines and caregiving.
- The foster parent has the difficult task of meeting the social-emotional needs of the infant/toddler, who in the best of circumstances will be returned to the biological parent. The foster parent can enhance the process by helping the infant/toddler keep the absent parent in mind and preparing the infant/toddler for visiting time.
- Photos, cassettes, telephone calls and letters may help bridge the unavoidable long-distance relationship. Even very young infants begin to recognize voices and gradually connect a particular voice to a particular person. Sending photos not only maintains visual contact but also gives the child permission to value the absent parent.
- Learn about the abilities the infant/toddler is developing at each age and how you and he/she can practice them. Enjoy the opportunities to explore, play and enrich a variety of learning experiences.
- Get to know your infant/toddler as a person with feelings, hopes and needs. Understand that any infant/toddler will have some stress and growth pains whether or not parents are together. Difficulties are often manifested in the earliest stages of development as temporary eating and sleeping disturbances, and later, in behavior.

This publication also provides useful guidelines for court-ordered visitations that are developmentally appropriate and considerate of the child's age and the state of the parent-child relationship. A copy of "Supporting Relationships for Infants and Toddlers with Two Homes" can

also be checked out from the King County Law Library at the Norm Maleng Regional Justice Center. [Click here to purchase the publication.](#)

You Can Keep Babies Healthy

It is easy to agree babies need to be kept safe and have loving, supportive relationships with those around them. You know this is true, and you are familiar with the research and proof supporting these statements. You can make a difference in the lives of the infants and their families by making a commitment to support SEC. Your donation will support the innovative work of SEC. Join your fellow community members and show your support today by making a contribution. [Click here to donate](#); put "SEC" in the "In Honor of" box. Thank you for your dedication to healthy babies and families.

SEC Featured Agency for Infants and Toddlers



WestSide Baby

basics for children in need

As families work together to strengthen their relationships, it's important that parents be able to provide basic necessities for their babies and toddlers. WestSide Baby is a nonprofit organization that collects items for children and babies and distributes them free of charge to South King County families in need. WestSide Baby is where SEC turns to help parents get the essentials, such as diapers, age-appropriate toys, clothing, and car seats.

[Click here for more information on WestSide Baby.](#)

New Report on Early Childhood Trauma and Lifelong Health

"The Foundations of Lifelong Health are Built in Early Childhood," a new research paper from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, concludes that early life experiences have a profound and lasting effect on the biological system. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) "can have lifelong consequences for both physical and mental well-being...result[ing] in weakened physiological responses, vulnerabilities to later impairments in health, and altered brain architecture." Notably, the report concludes that ACEs can affect physical and mental health regardless of a conscious memory of the trauma.

Because of the lasting impact of ACEs on lifelong health, the authors propose that decision makers consider:

- Evidence-based investments focusing on pre-natal and early childhood health.
- Decreasing ACEs and strengthening protective relationships to reduce chronic disease.

The Center on the Developing Child was founded in 2006 on the belief that the vitality and

sustainability of any society depend on the extent to which it provides opportunities early in life for all children to achieve their full potential and engage in responsible and productive citizenship. To access this report and many others, please visit the Center's website.

[Center on the Developing Child](#)

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SEC is made possible by a grant from the Stuart Foundation.

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