

 Quality Child Care Niagara

**Quality Child Care Niagara  
Community Conversation Café  
Brain Story**



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 Niagara Region  
COMMUNITY SERVICES

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**Agenda**

- Welcome and Network Introduction
- What is the Brain Story?
- Highlights and Summary Points
- Reflective questions
- Action plan

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**The Brain Story Certification**

- The Brain Story Certification is an in-depth course for professionals seeking a deeper understanding of brain development and the scientific underpinnings of the Brain Story developed by Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (AFWI).
- Explains how experiences shape our brains, including the early experiences.
- How relationships depend on those around us for the experiences that build our brain architecture.

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**Brain Architecture**

- Early experiences build brains, not just our genes.
- Brains are built in stages like a house.
- The early experiences affect the physical architecture of the developing brain.
- Walking into adulthood, it determines our physical and mental health and ability to maintain healthy relationships.
- It is important to have a solid foundation during early childhood to serve as a base for later development.




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**Brain Architecture**

- Through **serve and return** interactions, a solid brain foundation can be built by various forms of back-and-forth communication between a child and a caregiver.
- Encouraging self directed creative play is an important strategy to fuel development which promotes low anxiety, new experiences, active engagement, and learning from adults/peers.




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**Brain Architecture**

- When children are deprived from serve and return game it impairs development of skills and abilities, behaviour, and health.
- **Stress** also shapes the brain architecture in a developing child. Not all stress is bad.




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**POSITIVE** Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

**TOLERABLE** Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.

**TOXIC** Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.

Centre on the Developing Child Harvard University

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### Air Traffic Control

- **Executive function** and **self-regulation** skills are the mental processes that enable us to pay attention, plan ahead, prioritize tasks, problem solve and control our emotions.
- Establish routines and model social behaviour.
- Create and maintain supportive, reliable relationships.
- The earlier we invest in these skills through practice and coaching, the more effective the outcome for lifelong health.

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### Reflective Questions

- What does resilience mean to you?
- How can we as educators provide opportunities to build resiliency in programs?

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### Children's Mental Health and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** are negative, stressful, traumatizing events that occur before the age of 18 and affects health risk across the lifespan.
- Resilience in early life is critical to preventing and buffering toxic stress.



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### Children's Mental Health and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- ASQ:SE (Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional)
- Intergenerational – the impact and the health outcome affects the adult and the child



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### Addiction & The Brain

- **Addiction** is defined as a chronically relapsing disorder that is characterized by a compulsion to seek and take drug stimulus, a loss of control in limiting intake, and an emergence of a negative emotional state when access is denied.
- Recovery is a developmental process, not a singular event and not a prescribed outcome.
- Affects the whole family system.
- Parents who are misusing substances withdraw in the face of infant distress.

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### Using the Science of Early Brain Development to Build Resilient Children, Families, & Communities

- **Resilience** is an interplay of experience and genetics which is built over time.
- Knowing the research and science of early brain development can help reorganize policies and programs in order to provide protective factors for at risk children.




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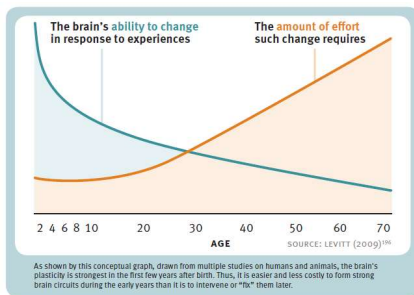
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### • Early Years Strengthen Resilience




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### Using the Science of Early Brain Development to Build Resilient Children, Families, & Communities

- Being trauma-informed is to increase knowledge about trauma and the impact it has by creating connection, sharing knowledge, and resources
- Trauma-informed creates a new narrative from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened?"



Substance Abuse for Mental Health Services Administration, 2014

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**Reflective Question**

- What are some ways we can become more trauma-informed in our practice?

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**As a Community**

- For positive development, young people need nurturing experiences.
- Children develop in an environment of relationships which affect their development.
- Relationships mean *all people consistently* in their lives.
- These experiences are individualized to each children's unique learning style, built on their interests, capabilities, initiatives, and self-awareness.

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**Action plan**

- What can you do to support the best outcome for the children in your program?
- How are you going to use the information you have gained in your daily practice?

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**Resources**

- Alberta Family Wellness Initiative:  
<https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/>
- Centre on the Developing Child Harvard University:  
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>
- The Story of Relationships and Experiences through the Science of Brain Development – The Brain Story (tip sheet provided)

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Questions?

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