

ECMH MODULE GUIDE: INTRODUCTION

Supporting materials for Professional Development Providers

This guide provides supplemental material for PD providers (coaches, mentors, directors, instructors, etc.) using the ECMH Modules to teach this important content about early brain development and the impact of toxic stress and to support implementation of evidence-based practices that give infants and young children experiences that build resilience through relationships.

Instructors: The activities and materials provided may be used to support the learners' active engagement in face to face instruction and the instructors' ability to assess student learning. Suggestions are offered about where each might be used, but instructors are encouraged to consider alternative ways to use the materials.

Other PD providers: The activities can be easily adapted for use by coaches, mentors, directors, etc. who may be able to provide on-site help. For each activity, suggestions are provided for how materials may be used to support learners as they complete the on-line modules to transfer learning to practice in their workplace settings.

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Funded by NC RttT-ELC Grant, 2016
Developer: Lanier DeGrella, PhD

Activity 1-1 How Do Children Grow?

Purpose This activity gives learners the opportunity to share what they know about early development. Suggested placement: at the beginning of Module 1 as an ice-breaker or as a pre-learning activity.

Instructions: Provide participants with MI-1 and instruct them to label each petal with a different domain of learning and development (NOTE: there is a petal for each of the 5 learning domains in NC Foundations plus 1 for brain development) and at least one thing they know about each aspect of development. (This can be as specific as a milestone and the approximate age a child might be expected to reach it or as general as a broad statement about development across the early years. An example is provided on MI-1.)

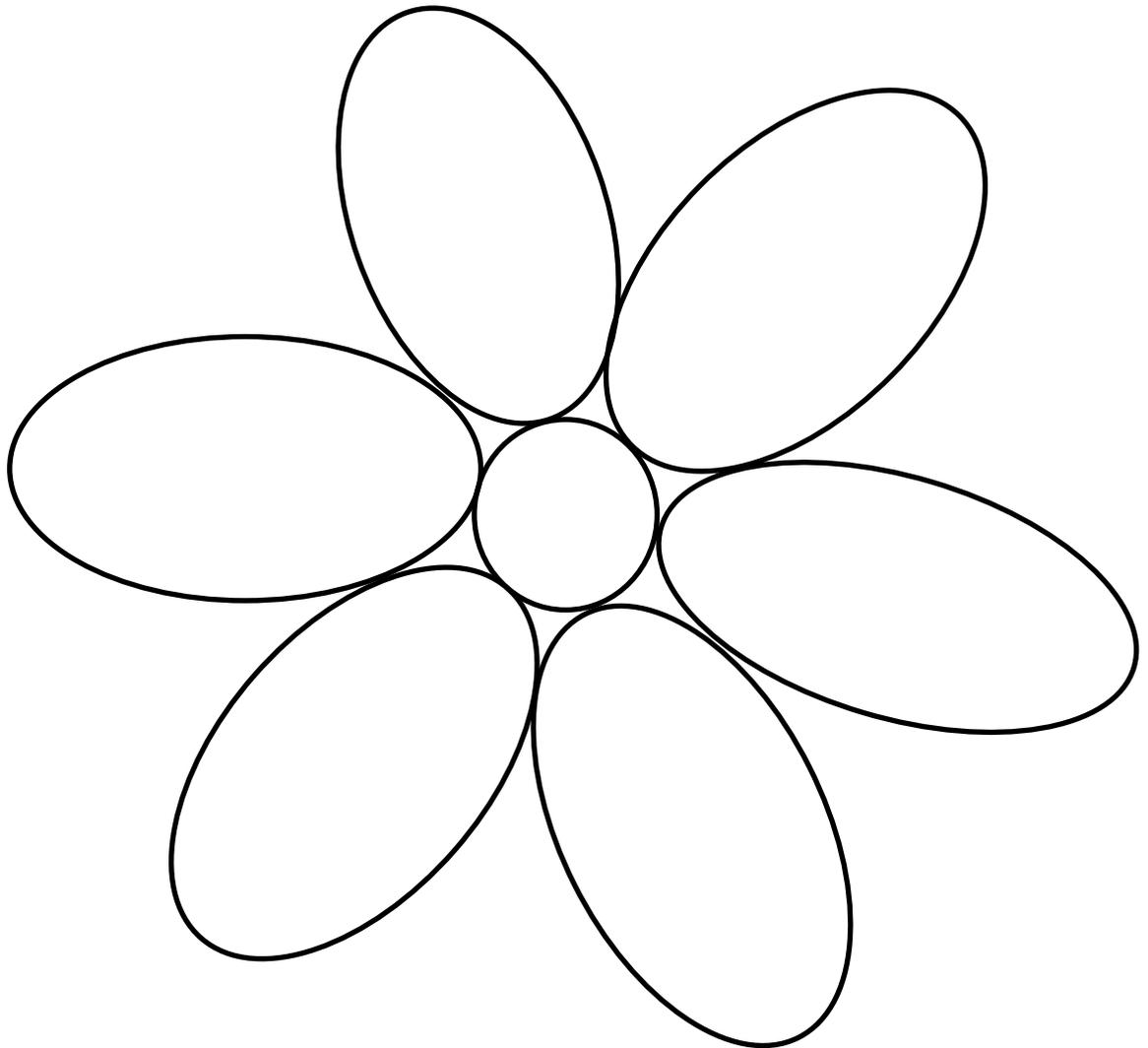
Invite participants to complete the task alone or with a partner if used as an icebreaker. During the activity, the instructor may circulate in order to assess what the group already knows about brain development and encourage them by acknowledging what they already know before proceeding into the content.

To wrap up the ice breaker, challenge each person to think of one thing children need as they develop that begins with the letter of their first name. Ask each person to introduce themselves by saying (for example) “My name is Ellie, and I will give children encouragement.” (with everyone participating or just a few volunteers if the group is very large).

For Coaches/Mentors: This activity can be adapted for use in coaching/mentoring relationships to learn what an adult already knows about development. Build upon this knowledge base by acknowledging what is already known (building confidence) and discover together a direction for future learning.

MATERIAL 1-1 HOW DO CHILDREN GROW?

1. Label each petal below with a different domain of learning and development.
2. Write at least one thing you know about each aspect of development on the petals. This might be a milestone and the age a child may be expected to achieve the milestone (example: walking independently at 12 months) or it could be a broader statement about development (example: toddlers can vary a lot in the timing of their first independent steps).



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Activity 1-2 Observing with a Social-Emotional Lens

Purpose: This activity provides the learner an opportunity to focus observations on social emotional development and the cues infants and young children give us about what they need. Suggested placement: after slide 15 (Keeping in the Comfort Zone) to practice and/or demonstrate this skill (learner assessment).

Instructions: For this activity photographs of children at various ages engaging in play either alone or near/with a peer are needed. Distribute at least one photo to each person/pair/small group (determined by size of the group). Provide participants MI-2. The task is to examine the photo as objectively as possible and document observations. Once this is completed, learners are instructed to review what has been recorded and respond to the following questions:

1. What do you think the child (children) is feeling and why do you think that?
2. Is this experience providing opportunities for self-regulation and if, yes, how?
3. What supports might this child (children) need from the caregiver?
4. How might this experience impact social-emotional health?

After about 10 minutes, provide time for sharing. Notice if the social/emotional domain is (or isn't) included in the original observation notes shared. Comment that it is not unusual for this aspect of development to be more challenging to document as we may not be as familiar with related developmental indicators and it's simply harder to "see". Recommend "polishing" this lens with knowledge and being intentional about using this lens when observing very young children.

NOTE: Photos can tell much more than expected, and often this is what classrooms teachers have to use for recording and reflecting on individual child development. For the purpose of instruction and depending on the setting, a video clip can be used.

For Coaches/Mentors: Practice using this lens with support is ideal. In addition to using photographs and video clips, an on-site paired and focused observation with your TA partner may be an option.

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MATERIAL 1-2 OBSERVING WITH A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LENS

1. Document your observations. Remember to be objective as you record what you see.

2. Respond to the following questions:

What do you think the child (children) is feeling and why do you think that?

Is this experience providing opportunities for self-regulation and if, yes, how?

What supports might this child (children) need from the caregiver?

How might this experience impact social-emotional well-being?

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Activity 1-3 Providing Culturally Sensitive Care

Purpose: This activity provides the learner an opportunity to reflect on their practices that support culturally sensitive care and make an improvement plan based on their self-assessment. Suggested placement: after review of the definition of Early Childhood Mental Health on Slide 19.

Instructions: Provide each participant MI-3 and direct them to rate themselves on each item using the numbers at the top. Let them know that they will not be asked to share this. Once the scoring is completed, instruct them to use this reflection exercise to identify what they want to learn more about in order to enhance their practices and what their next steps will be to do this (space is provided). Emphasize the importance of providing culturally sensitive care to the child's healthy social, emotional, and behavioral well-being.

Ask if there are any questions about this and/or ask a few volunteers to share their thoughts or feelings about this topic

NOTE: This activity can evoke strong ideas/feelings for some. Encourage everyone to listen respectfully to each other should this happen. Acknowledge that our ability to identify our own values and beliefs AND seek to understand the culture of others are important steps to implementing practices that support every infant and child's social emotional competence.

For Coaches/Mentors: Providing support to TA partners to implement culturally sensitive care begins with awareness of personal values and biases. Consider using this reflection activity to begin the conversation and identify a starting point for your work together in this area. Model respectful listening in your interactions with your TA partners. Talk about how you each feel when you are listened to in this way. Connect this to building responsive relationships with children, families and co-workers.

MATERIAL 1-3 PROVIDING CULTURALLY SENSITIVE CARE

Reflect on the statements* below and rate yourself on each one as follows:

- 1—most of the time
- 2—some of the time
- 3—rarely
- 4—never

___ I know what my personal values, beliefs and biases are and how this impacts my work with children and families.

___ I appreciate others' points of view even when different or contrary to my own.

___ I actively seek to learn about and understand the views and experiences of families that may be different from my own.

___ I implement a variety of strategies to engage with families in two-way communication.

___ I am committed to ongoing dialogue with families when cultural conflicts arise.

___ I am able to negotiate resolutions to cultural conflicts respectfully.

___ I understand that solutions to cultural conflicts must meet the needs of all perspectives.

I would like to learn more about how to improve my practices related to the following:

My next steps to do this:

**Adapted from PITC Keys to Culturally Sensitive Care*

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Activity 2-1 Stress: A Sorting Game

Purpose: This activity provides the learner an opportunity to identify early experiences as stressors that **may** be tolerable or toxic. Suggested placement: after Slide 9 (Toxic Stress) as a review or to assess understanding of the content.

Instructions: Provide each participant M2-1 and ask them to think about what they've learned so far about stress. Read the instructions at the top of the game. After participants complete the task, let them know that you will read each of the early experiences and ask them to stand if they identified it as Tolerable but remain seated if they marked it as Toxic. The first time there is disagreement among the group (that is, some stand and some sit for the same item), note that there really isn't a definitive "right or wrong" answer for these. Make the point that what is tolerable or toxic depends on individual factors, including:

- Availability of a dependable adult available for support
- Whether the stress is chronic and repeated, with little time for recovery
- The child's individual vulnerability (including factors such as inborn temperament as well as cumulative stressors experienced in their life)

Ask for a volunteer to read the sentences at the bottom of M2-1.

Lead a discussion using the following questions:

Do you see yourself in this sentence? Who else do you see? (try to elicit roles that may not be represented in the room...home visitors, early intervention providers, etc.)

What are you already doing to be a positive force in the lives of infants and children?

For Coaches/Mentors: Make sure you and your TA partner have similar understanding of stress and how it impacts early brain development. Completing this activity together is a good starting point before examining their role in being a positive force in the lives of children experiencing stress. Some TA partners may not recognize themselves in the quote. Those who may feel unprepared when the stakes are so high may be ready to develop a plan to increase their understanding and build confidence.

MATERIAL 2-1 STRESS: A SORTING GAME

Consider the early experiences below. These stressors may impact early brain development and have the **potential** to be tolerable or toxic. Identify each below as an example of Tolerable or Toxic Stress.

Early Experience	T= Tolerable X= Toxic
1. Premature birth	
2. Childhood illness or injury	
3. Severe neglect	
4. Chaotic child care environment	
5. Caregiver substance abuse	
6. Exposure to hazardous chemical	
7. Parents divorce	
8. Exclusion by peers/ bullying	
9. Natural disaster	
10. Witness domestic violence	
11. Death in family	
12. Frequent neighborhood violence	

*Providing trauma-informed/developmentally sensitive care is an appropriate and important role for anyone involved in providing services to children and their families.
Anyone providing services to infants and children and their families can be a positive force in the healing process.*

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Activity 2-2 Managing Stress

Purpose: This activity challenges the learner to reflect on how they manage their own stress. Suggested placement: after Slide 18 (Altered Social Perception) to identify the connection between managing personal stress and ability to provide a buffer for children experiencing their own stress.

Instructions: Introduce this activity by asking how participants are feeling about the content covered up to this point about stress. Note that it is OK to feel disheartened and acknowledge that when supporting children and families experiencing stress, especially toxic stress, we have good intentions. And yet, many of us also have stress in our own lives that has the potential to get in the way of those good intentions if not “managed”.

Ask participants to pick a partner and share strategies they use to manage their stress. After sufficient time, ask for volunteers to share. Capture the strategies on chart paper.

Wrap up by acknowledging that it is up to us, the adults, to manage our stress as much as we can so that we can be “present” with the children and families we support. Encourage participants to consider that “how we are” is as important as “what we do” to support early childhood mental health.

For Coaches/Mentors: Consider how discouraging it may be for your TA partners to hear about the potentially negative impact of toxic stress on early brain development. Open the door to conversation about this and the related topic of managing their own stress so that they can be the buffer children and families need them to be. Some may need more information about strategies for managing stress than others. Program Administrators may also need to be part of the conversation as they can be a buffer for their staff by providing supports like breaks when needed or an extra pair of hands during challenging times of the day.

ECMH MODULE 2: TOXIC STRESS & EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

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Activity 2-3 Reflecting on Trust and Relationships

Purpose: This activity provides the learner an opportunity to reflect on factors that impact trust in their relationships and relate this to the benefits of building trust in new relationships with children, families and co-workers. Suggested placement: after Slide 22 (So What Can We Do?) to set the stage for the next module on Building Resilience Through Early Relationships.

Instructions:

Part I: Direct participants to pull out their cell phones. Once they have done this, tell them to unlock their phone and hand it to the person sitting behind them. Comment on the body language and facial expressions you observe. Most will not know the person behind them and experience feelings related to trust or lack there-of. Connect this to a parent's feeling about handing their baby or preschooler over to a teacher they don't know. Allow phones to go back to their owners. Ask if anyone has anything they'd like to share about this before moving on to Part II.

Part II: Provide each participant M2-3. Tell participants to write in the name of someone in their life (past or present) for each "degree" on the "trust meter". Once they have done this, ask them to briefly explain why they put each person where they did. Ask for a volunteer to share for each "degree" (maintaining confidentiality). Make the point that all relationships are not "equal".

Lead a discussion using the following questions:

What are the benefits of relationships that are high on the trust meter?

How does this relate to relationships that are NEW with children, families, and co-workers?

What strategies do you use to build trust in these new relationships?

For Coaches/Mentors: Completing this activity with a new TA partner and sharing your experiences can be a good way to get to know each other. Listen closely and set the pace for your work together that matches the needs of your partner. Remember that your partner may need to know that you are someone they can trust before they can move forward in the coaching/mentoring relationship.

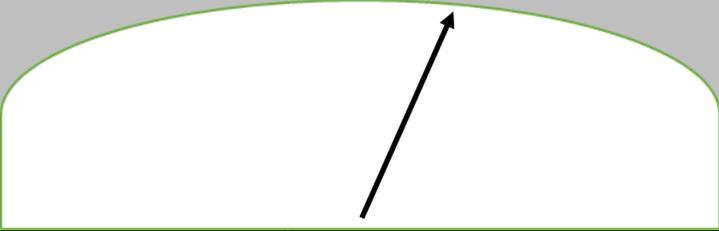
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MATERIAL 2-3 REFLECTING ON TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

Reflect on your relationships (past or present) and the degree of trust that you associate with each. Below write in the name of one person for each “degree” on the “trust meter”. Next explain briefly why you put each person where you did.

TRUST METER		
DEGREE OF TRUST	WHO?	WHY?
MAXIMUM		
MODERATE		
LOW		



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Activity 3-1 Portrait of an Early Care & Education Professional

Purpose: This activity asks the learner to identify characteristics of their “ideal” early care & education provider incorporating what they have learned so far about early brain development, self-regulation, stress, and building resilience. Suggested placement: after Slide 9 (What Research Tells Us) as a review or assessment of learning.

Instructions: Ask participants to create small groups and provide each group with chart paper and drawing materials (color pencils, crayons, markers). Instruct each group to create a portrait of the “ideal” early care and education provider using drawings/symbols/ words that include characteristics and skills reflected in the content of the ECMH modules covered so far. (Instructor can circulate to encourage and provide feedback to each group as needed.) Once each group has had sufficient time, ask each group to report their ideas noting that they need not repeat something others shared prior to their turn.

Wrap up by asking the following questions:

Did we miss anything?

How did you feel during this activity? Did you see yourself in the portrait?

NOTE: Be prepared to acknowledge all feelings shared as valid and empathize with any anxiety or stress participants may feel about living up to this ideal especially when the stakes are so high.

For Coaches/Mentors: For your TA partners working through the on-line modules this activity is an opportunity to creatively share what they’ve learned about adult characteristics and skills that support brain development and build resilience. Incorporating this strategy to “cement” learning by sharing it with others may be just the beginning of identifying additional goals related to sharing this knowledge with families or planning early experiences to build resilience.

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Activity 3-2 Taking Care of You!

Purpose: This activity asks the learner to reflect on their own needs and identify ways they do or could take care of themselves. Suggested placement: after Slide 24 (3:1 Positivity Ratio) to assess learner’s understanding of factors that support resilience.

Instructions: Ask participants if this sounds familiar: “I couldn’t take a walk this morning because my child missed the bus and I had to drive her to school.” OR “I had to cancel my annual physical because I had to cook and deliver food to my church for a funeral.” Make the point that many early care and education professionals are focused on taking care of others and are NOT great at taking care of themselves.

Distribute M3-2 and review the instructions to consider what they have learned so far about building resilience and make a shift to think about what they need and how they do or could take care of themselves to support resilience in their own lives. Encourage each person to take their time completing the first two items. Once they have set a goal for themselves, they may find a partner who’s also finished to discuss the quotes and how they relate to the topic.

The instructor may circulate to provide feedback and support as participants make their lists and set a goal. Once everyone has this completed, call the large group back together and ask for volunteers to read a quote and share their thoughts about it in relation to the topic.

For Coaches/Mentors: As you build a relationship with a TA partner, you may become aware of the need for support in this area. You can use this activity to start a conversation about acknowledging their own needs and using strategies that they learned in Module 3 for building resilience in their own lives. In turn, you have an opportunity to strengthen your relationship and build your TA partner’s resilience parallel to helping them implement strategies to build the children’s resilience.

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MATERIAL 3-2 TAKING CARE OF YOU!

Consider what you've learned about building children's resilience. What do **you** need? List some of ways you take care of yourself that support resilience in your own life.

What else could you do to take care of yourself? Set at least 1 goal.

Find a partner and discuss any of the quotes below in terms of taking care of yourself.

The future depends on what you do today.
—Mahatma Ghandi

Fear less, hope more; eat less, chew more; whine less, breathe more; talk less, say more; hate less, love more; and all good things will be yours.
—Swedish Proverb

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.
—Marcel Proust

Learn how to exhale, the inhale will take care of itself.
—Carla Meducci Ardito

Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.
—Dalai Lama

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Activity 3-3 Responsive Interactions: A Comparison

Purpose: This activity asks the learner to compare two interactions and analyze each in terms of building relationships that support resilience. Suggested placement: after Slide 28 (Goals of Responsive Interaction) as an assessment of learning.

Instructions: Distribute M3-3 to participants and have them form small groups. Instruct each group to read each scenario and discuss the interactions between the adult and the child/ren. Ask each group to record (on the back of the scenario handout or on chart paper) their analysis of each in terms of building relationships that support resilience. Encourage them to reflect back on the content shared on slides 27 and 28 as they complete the task. (Instructor can circulate to encourage and provide feedback to each group as needed.) Once each group has had sufficient time, ask each group to report their ideas noting that they need not repeat something others shared prior to their turn.

Wrap up by noting the differences in these interactions if not already mentioned (Teacher directed activity v. child initiated play). Make the point that there is not a single “right” way to interact with children, but one interaction may create more possibilities for building trust and relationships that support resilience. Ask for any further thoughts about this.

NOTE: For the purpose of instruction and depending on the setting, video clips of interactions between adults and children can be used.

For Coaches/Mentors: For this activity it is important that examples of interactions you use include the age range of children relevant to your TA partner. When video taping is a strategy used in your coaching/mentoring work, this activity may be applied to the review of those clips. This will allow you to acknowledge your TA partner’s responsive interactions, link these to support for building resilience and encourage a focus on more intentional practices to build relationships through responsive interactions.

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MATERIAL 3-3 RESPONSIVE INTERACTIONS: A COMPARISON

Scenario 1: Jason, age 4, is playing in the kitchen area. Three plates are on the table and Jason is putting a variety of food items on each. Mrs. Scott has been watching and has noticed that Jason is muttering to himself. His facial expressions suggest he is feeling angry or frustrated. She moves closer and says “Good Morning, Jason. It looks like you’ve prepared a wonderful meal! Do you have room for me at the table?” Jason looks up, quietly says “yes”, and points to a chair. “Thank you, Jason. I see some pancakes here...I love pancakes for breakfast.” Jason frowns slightly and says “I like syrup on my pancakes, but sometimes my Mom doesn’t have any.” Jason pretends to pour syrup on his pancakes. “Mom tells me I should be happy I have a hot breakfast and stop complaining.” Mrs. Scott’s face mirrors Jason’s disappointment. “It sounds like you are disappointed when this happens.” Jason nods “yes”. Mrs. Scott continues a relaxed back and forth exchange during play to allow Jason a chance to talk about his feelings.

Scenario 2: Amy, Charlie and Emma (age 3) have joined Mrs. James at the table where there are many small plastic bears in a variety of colors and bowls of matching colors. Mrs. James says “I wonder who can find a red bear?” She checks to make sure they each have the correct color and says “Great job!” with a smile on her face. She continues until they also have correctly found a blue, green and yellow bear. “Now line them up next to your red bear.” Mrs. James encourages each child as they complete the task. When she notices that Amy is struggling to line her bears up she asks “Do you need some help, Amy?” When Amy says, “I can do it”, Mrs. James gives her the time she needs. “You kept working on that until you DID do it. Way to go, Amy!” The activity continues until bears are placed in bowls of matching color. Mrs. James invites the children to continue to sort the bears by color. After a few minutes, Emma and Charlie leave to join another activity.

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