November….Triggers

Have to understand that our children don’t always perceive the holidays as exciting.

**In order for a survivor to feel safe they need to feel like they are in control! They know what to expect, they know how people will react, they know where the next meal is coming from**

**1. Identify and manage triggers**

Quick overview of Limbic System

We know it first receives sensory feedback which goes to the amygdala. Amygdala uses the Hippocampus to help decide what emotion to have (fear or not) and then what to do about it. Depending on the ability of the hippocampus our children either go back to status quo or fight, flight or freeze.

Fight flight or freeze gets called all kinds of things…lying, manipulating, ignoring, etc.. We have to look behind those behaviors!

Identify the Triggers

Triggers are based in a sensory input from an external or internal source.

External…

Internal…

Other important points!

-Lots of times can be from pre-verbal memory or experience.

-Most of the time a trigger happens quickly and quietly.

-It is extremely difficult to stop a trigger once it has begun.

-Have to be the safe, kind, loving place where your child can land afterwards.

-Best way to deal is to get ahead of the triggers.

**Manage Triggers and the outcomes**

1. Emotional Age

2. Trauma Deficits

-rigid, impulsiveness, lacks cause and affect thinking, mistrusting, don’t believe worthy, etc ---

Remember…a person that goes to f,f or f is all about survival and only survival. They will do and say whatever it takes to survive. This is typically why our holidays are not very peaceful.

3. Sensory Path Perspective

-use the knowledge we have about the Limbic System and create a holiday season in which our child can be successful. Decreased anxiety and with enough practice can become a positive, enjoyable season for all.

Tools and Techniques

Use a Sensory Path Perspective to get ahead of and help manage triggers.

Using the 5 senses we are going to look at different scenarios that holidays bring up and the tools and techniques we can use to get ahead of the trigger.

**1.Smell** is a Big Big Trigger

One of the last senses to go before we die. Very primal

We smell our mama to identify her.

Food

1. Remember emotional age

2. Deficits…irrational beliefs about themselves and the world. – you may forget to feed them. They don’t deserve it.

…can’t understand time – anxiety is high so even less understanding…later? In a bit?

…too impulsive to walk past a bowl of candy

…the sheer abundance might be overwhelming. What if I don’t pick the right thing? What if I don’t like it?

…issues with regulation – pick too much or too little

3. the smells can be overwhelming/over stimulating, can remind of circumstances and people – spices, burning food,

Other smells like

Candles…

People…

 Christmas tree…

Tools to help get in front of the triggers

Keep to routine…

Have food they…

Feed them….

Keep their world…

YOU are in charge of…

Remove those items that….

Have appropriate…

Cut back on sensory input…

If you know a family member smokes…

Use a lotion or smell that is you to…

2. **Taste** really goes along with smell in this case…same tools except add

Food

Gum or mints…

Don’t push…

People

Give your child permission to…

Be the bridge and…

**3. Sounds**

To a person who is easily triggered sounds can become noise very quickly! Like the Charlie Brown Teacher. We have to be intentional with our communication in these moments.

1. Emotional age-missed developmental stages – high startle reflex, limited engagement time

2. Deficits

-unable to ask for help, hard time with abstract thinking or cause and effect, hyper vigilant, distractable

Music…can calm or trigger. Be sure to know what our child can handle. …won’t ask if can be done will just endure

New and different noises…bells – tell Salvation Army story. Didn’t see it coming, couldn’t make sense of it, startled,

Repetitive noises…doorbells, same Christmas cd over and over…again don’t expect it, rules don’t apply from one minute to the next bcause of limbic system so have to be hyper alert about whether the situation is safe.

People … loud voices, deep voices, crowds can be triggers

Tools

Remember your child is closer to…

Name it…

Music brings emotion…

Paint the pic of…

Put a sign on the door saying “just come in”

Head set

Book on tape

Book

Quiet space as escape plan

**4. Sight** – of course sights can be a trigger. Probably the easiest for us to understand.

I am reminded of someone, a moment, a tradition = loss or they are preverbal and I don’t even know why that person, place or thing stirs me.

Now add in emotional age-inability to comfort self,

Deficits –difficulty reading non-verbal cues, difficulty reading social cues, hair trigger limbic sstem, not great orientation with time and space, memory issues, etc

Tools

Know your child’s…

Paint a pic of…

Put words to your…

Prioritize your need for…

**5. Touch** can indicate control over life or create a feeling of less control

1. Emotional age-be sure to meet at emotional age here

2. Deficit -impulsive, no object constancy, hair trigger, hypersensitive to touch, sensory integration issues, irrational thoughts, issues with focus, no constancy.

Food

Taking food. I have to touch it to make it mine. If I don’t take it now it might not be there.

Other

Sneaking into presents…same as above, add impulsive

Breaking your treasures…impulsive, issues with focus, hair trigger,

Breaking their new items…self destructive behavior, reenactment of past, difficulty with emotional self regulation, difficulty describing internal states, etc

People

Wanting to touch them, have them sit on lap,

Tools

Put things…

 Give your child a chance to… Create opportunities for…

Tweak your… Your child cannot take on your values when so anxious. Even if you say how important an item is to you. He can’t control his deficits. Don’t prescribe…

Have things around/out that can be handled. Decorate tree with that in mind for a while.

Don’t wrap presents

Give child permission to or make rule about hugs and high 5’s

Give child permission to or run rough shot over people who want too much from your child.

**Other Triggers**

Weather

Change in temp, season can trigger –anniversaries, grieving fear

Deficits - No cause and effect thinking, irrational beliefs about the world, no object constancy, difficulty reading non-verbal cues, hair trigger alert system

Tools

Prepare them...comment in earshot even

Comment about what is in place to keep him safe

Lay out clothes

Shorter times outside and maybe with someone under extreme conditions

**Anxiety**

Remember grappling for control

Don’t trust good –what if I do the wrong thing or say the wrong thing

Push you (the goodness) back

Behaviors are expressing emotion not defiance…look closer

Tools

-Spread gifts out

-Unwrapping scenarios

-Gifts that create the net not distance from it (things they will cause the most issues with take them away from the net)

-Paint the pic

-Use behavior as a cue that something has changed, been triggered. Stop. Be there. Fill emotional need.

5. Teach your family and friends what you are dealing with and how they can support you.

1. My child has suffered trauma within their caregiving system by virtue of losing his primary attachment figure, and this kind of trauma has lasting results on him/her in many areas.

Attachment –

Some important facts I know about attachment include that;

1. Attachment begins in utero. My child was being wired to trust his biological Mom. When he lost her (no matter what age) he lost his assurance of survival. He lost his some or all of his ability to give someone else that kind of trust again.

2. Attachment happens one person at a time. It begins with the primary attachment figure moves to the other parent the outward to Grandparents, other family members and then persons in outer rings like church or other groups we spend a lot of time with.

Having a break in his attachment affects his ability to trust another person to take care of his needs (emotionally and physically) This really gets in the way of me being able to be his Mom but also gets in the way of him being able to have a “one and only” – that person who he knows, that no matter what, - now or when he is 35 - will be there for them. Who Cares. Who Loves him. Etc

When I or (we) look at why we adopted our child. We know that what we most want for him is to feel like he has that “one and only.”(or no matter what family) We want him to heal enough to believe he is wanted and loved no matter what. That he is valuable. And that we CAN and CHOOSE to be all of that for him.

Biologically- affects brain development…which results in gaps in emotional development. Don’t know how to do healthy family relationships. Never taught to calm themselves. Lots of anxiety. Mistrust due to physical impacts on the Limbic system