



Resource Article

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EI PROVIDER RELIENCY

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We know that provider resiliency is important when considering our work with families and their young children, but how can we support and bolster this concept from within our organization? Trudi Norman-Murch set out to explore this idea by examining the organizational approach of a large nonprofit human service delivery agency in her article, 'Keeping Our Balance on a Slippery Slope: Training and Supporting Infant/Family Specialists Within an Organizational Context'.

Norman-Murch reviewed the structure and approach for the professional development of staff members for the human services agency, Southwest Human Development (SHD) in Phoenix, Arizona. SHD established an organizational approach to: (1) support staff with integrating current knowledge about developmental science into their work with children and families and (2) support those staff who have little or no training in the area of mental health to better understand the emotional-relational perspective. With this in mind, guiding principles for the agency

emerged: (a) relationships (between interventionists and family) will impact the intervention; b) feelings matter; and (c) past experiences shape current realities -- our beliefs about ourselves and our expectations of others. And a core curriculum with three content areas was developed: 1) Professional use of self (e.g., professional boundaries, clinical interviewing skills); 2) Child development (i.e., knowledge about developmental themes); and 3) Caregiver-Child relationships (e.g., recognize, support and enhance parental sensitivity and responsiveness, be aware of parent's representation of self and child).

Program leadership continues to be at the forefront of the SHD philosophy. In addition to establishing the core curriculum, managers and supervisors participate in a number of related and pertinent activities including, child development study groups, leadership seminars, department directors meetings and active participation/guidance in staff development. The leadership team designed the Staff Training Matrix to identify core knowledge and

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competencies and identify possible opportunities for learning and mastery. It is completed in an ongoing manner and is the basis for each employee's personal development plan.

The role of supervision is also paramount to the success of the SHD professional development program. The SHD is committed to regular, reflective, collaborative supervision. Supervision is seen as a vehicle for supporting staff development. This is done both individually and in groups. Once again the ripple of 'emotional-relational perspective' is noted. And the importance of trust amongst staff involved in this supervision is underscored. Often, supervisors can assist staff in making the link between theory and practice by offering a safe place to discuss concerns, inconsistencies and any other situations that may come up. After trainings, participants are encouraged to consider such questions as, 'What is most valuable from this experience?', 'How can it be applied to

current families/situations?' and 'How can this experience be improved'? Also important to keep in mind is the importance of becoming sensitive to each staff member's vulnerabilities and ways of asking for assistance.

The SHD program has set up a comprehensive organizational framework to support and bolster professional development within their human service delivery staff. The program's philosophy concerning families and children is reflected in their professional development plans for staff. They set out to, "create an environment in which staff members are encouraged to step back and consider the meaning of their work on a regular basis."

Norman-Murch, T. (2005). Keeping Our Balance on a Slippery Slope Training and Supporting Infant/Family Specialists Within an Organizational Context. *Infants & Young Children*, 18 (4), pp. 308-322.

KIT Newsletters are available online at www.edis.army.mil



On the WWW

The web resource this month is a resiliency quiz by Al Siebert, PhD. Dr. Siebert was the author of the book "The Resiliency Advantage" which won the Independent Publisher's Best Self-Help Book Award in 2006. In his book he spoke of how healthy, resilient people have stress-resistant personalities and learn valuable lessons from rough experiences.

Take the resiliency quiz online and learn about your own resiliency. After completing the quiz it will provide you an interpretation including the qualities people of your resiliency level share.

The direct link to the quiz is:
<http://www.resiliencycenter.com/resiliencyquiz.shtml>



What do the data say?

What makes some people more resilient than others?

People all over experience a variety of challenging situations. Yet, some are better able to cope and bounce back. Why is this? Is it because of an innate or a learned ability?

Professor Carol Dweck of the Stanford Department of Psychology has explored 'mindsets' and how these can influence one's abilities and efforts. In her research she identified two primary mindsets, fixed and growth.

She defines a fixed mindset as people who believe abilities are innate - you either have the skills/talent/ability or you don't. Contrarily, a growth mindset is believing that people can grow abilities and with practice and effort - they can learn abilities and get better over time.

Consider the following comments and notice how one puts the focus on innate ability while the other acknowledges the process and efforts of an individual.

- Wow, you are a natural at *that*. I wish I had the ability to do *that*.
- It was really neat how you did *that*. How did you work through the process to do *that*?

The first statement exemplifies a "fixed mindset" while the second statement is an example of a "growth mindset."

The following excerpt from Dweck's research reinforces the influence of praising effort and process versus innate ability.

People can also learn these self-theories from the kind of praise they receive (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Ironically, when students are praised for

their intelligence, they move toward a fixed theory. Far from raising their self-esteem, this praise makes them challenge-avoidant and vulnerable, such that when they hit obstacles their confidence, enjoyment, and performance decline. When students are praised for their effort or strategies (their process), they instead take on a more malleable theory - they are eager to learn and highly resilient in the face of difficulty.

Thus self-theories play an important (and causal role) in challenge seeking, self-regulation, and resilience, and changing self-theories appears to result in important real world changes in how people function.

A growth mindset acknowledges the reality that challenges are inevitable and reinforces the positive results of effort in the face of setbacks. In applying effort it is helpful to draw upon strategies. Following are some strategies as well as traits of resilient people.

- Maintain a positive attitude
- Recognize that the negative experience is temporary
- Stay flexible
- Maintain physical health
- Seek support

For more information about mindset and Dr. Dweck's work see www.mindsetworks.com

Dweck, C. S. (2008). Can personality be changed? *Current Directions in Psychological Sciences*, 17 (6) p. 391-394. Accessed March 2013 from: <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/psychology/cgi-bin/drupal/system/files/cdweckpersonalitychanged.pdf>



Consultation Corner

From January through April 2013, we are excited to have Dr. Lisa Naig Hodges as our consultation corner expert. Lisa will address the topic *Early Intervention (EI) Provider Resiliency*.

How do EI providers cope with stressors in order to help alleviate and prevent professional burnout and compassion fatigue?

The ability to identify a direct outcome from coping with stress is difficult because the stressors change over time and the coping strategies can be varied and contextual. However, one thing that is evident is the cyclical and circumstantial nature of how stress and coping interact to influence EI providers' personal and professional satisfaction with their jobs. The answer to this question, in part, comes back to EI providers' original and ongoing passion for their jobs, how many EI providers start to look for different jobs every year, how EI providers professional and personal stress may become intertwined as they realize work is overtaking other aspects of their lives, how the EI providers cope with stressful day-to-day situations they encounter, and how EI providers enjoy good days at work.

Cyclically, the interaction between stress and coping may seem to affect job satisfaction most around the time job contracts are being renewed and may result in EI providers wanting to look for another job. On the other hand, the circumstantial nature of the interaction tends to occur more frequently (e.g., daily, weekly, or monthly), due to different situations encountered and how they affect their personal lives. Depending on how EI providers feel about their jobs on any given day, their levels of personal and professional job satisfaction may build their resiliency or potentially lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue.

Having Passion for the Job

In relation to personal and professional job satisfaction, EI providers talk about their children and families as the reason for getting into the field originally and staying in it. They may also refer to colleagues making their jobs enjoyable. In addition,

some EI providers may report that the paycheck keeps them going as well as the flexibility of everyday being different. For the most part, many EI providers understand that personal and professional job satisfaction fluctuates. Satisfaction can be dependent upon the size of the caseload, whether or not they feel good about the services they provide, and how much they enjoy what they are doing.

Looking for Other Work

Despite feeling personal and professional job satisfaction, many EI providers look for a different job every year. EI providers may report that there are years when looking starts even earlier than in other years. For example, they may usually start looking in the spring, but find a year when it is in the late fall or early winter. In addition, some EI providers think about changing jobs much more frequently over the course of the year and even looking at a different field.

In some ways, changing jobs may be considered a positive strategy, especially if they remain in the field of education and maintain their dedication to supporting children and families. However, it can also be an indicator for not being resilient to work stressors.

Realizing Work is Overtaking Their Personal Lives

EI providers' job satisfaction may also be affected by the circumstantial nature of the interaction between stress and coping. The EI providers may report how their professional lives affect their personal lives, for example, in terms of relationships and health. They may feel the effects of trying to cope with work stressors infringing on their personal lives, especially when working in excess of 40 hours per week. Not surprising, all of those extra hours affect the home life, thus, EI providers start to feel their lives center around eating, sleeping, and working at the expense of relationships with family and friends.

In terms of health effects, EI providers may start to experience headaches, elevated blood pressure and

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the effects from not getting a full night of sleep over a long period of time. Consequently, many EI providers may report waking up in the middle of the night due to worrying about their job and what needed to be done. Along with that, EI providers may label the emotions they feel due to work stressors as panic, frustration, anger and anxiety.

Coping with Stressful Day-to-Day Situations

Stressful day-to-day situations at work also increase the likelihood of EI providers not being satisfied with their jobs. Many EI providers can describe what a day would look like where nothing was going well and how it could be improved. EI providers may describe situations relating to families they serve. Some may say such a day consisted of a family getting upset or confrontational with them, others may say cancellations were an indicator of a day that was not going to go well. With cancellations, they may feel they are wasting time by going from place to place or having no place to go between a cancelled visit and the next scheduled one. EI providers also report not getting enough sleep the night before results in a day not going very well because they are very tired.

During the workday, some EI providers say listening to music, taking a break to read, or saying a quick prayer can help. Others may decide to make a positive effort

not to let their “negative” circumstances dictate their whole day. Or, they may find that going to another home visit and having a productive time can turn around the “bad day.” After work, EI providers may feel going home and relaxing can save some days that are not going well.

Enjoying Good Days at Work

There are also day-to-day situations that positively influence EI providers’ job satisfaction. They may describe a favorable day at work as having appointments with families go well. Along with that, EI providers may report getting information from families and feeling connected with the families and children as another aspect of a favorable day. Beyond the families, EI providers may report getting paperwork finished, being rested, and/or just seeing the sunshine as part of a favorable day.

Summary

Resiliency is influenced by interactions between stressors and coping strategies and how they influence personal and professional job satisfaction. Effects on job satisfaction may be both personal and professional and cyclical and circumstantial in nature as a result of the stress and coping interaction. The cyclical nature typically tends to happen at or around contract renewal time whereas the circumstantial nature of the interaction tends to happen more frequently, for example, daily, weekly, or monthly.



Continuing Education for KIT Readers

The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for KIT readers.

In line with the focus on *EI Provider Resiliency* readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (January through March 2013) and

completing a multiple-choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

KIT readers will receive the exam in April 2013. There is no need to register for the CEUs. Rather, if you are interested complete the exam online at www.edis.army.mil Upon successful completion of the exam, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact

Thank you for your continued interest in the KIT.
Please share your KIT questions/ideas via email to
EDISCSPD@amedd.army.mil

