



Perinatal and Early Childhood Mental Health Network

Training and Technical Assistance Center

The Unique Toddler World: Key Foundational Elements for a Lifetime of Thriving

Presented by
Tovah P. Klein, Ph.D.

Who We Are

The New York City Perinatal and Early Childhood Mental Health Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC), is funded by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH).

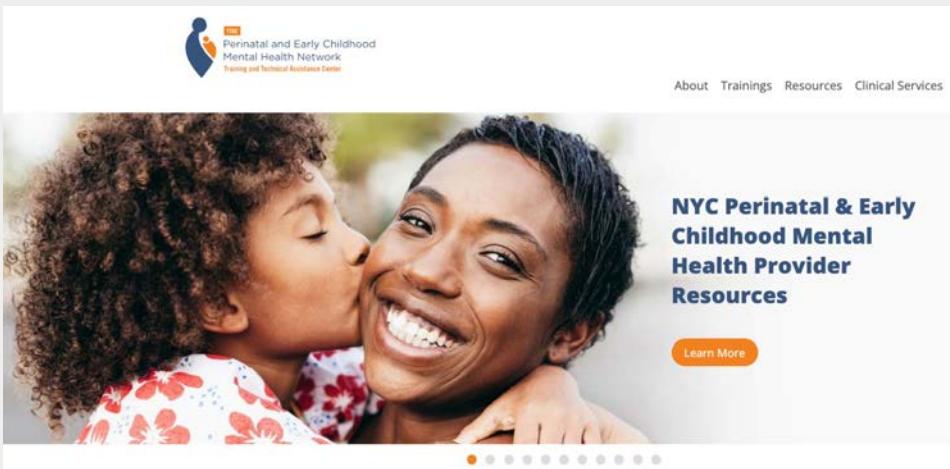
TTAC is a partnership between the New York Center for Child Development (NYCCD) and the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research

- **New York Center for Child Development** has been a major provider of early childhood mental health services in New York with expertise in informing policy and supporting the field of Early Childhood Mental Health through training and direct practice
- **NYU McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research** houses the Community and Managed Care Technical Assistance Centers (CTAC & MCTAC) and the Center for Workforce Excellence (CWE). These TA centers offer clinic, business, and system transformation supports statewide to all behavioral healthcare providers across NYS.

TTAC is tasked with building capacity and competencies of mental health professionals and early childhood professionals in family serving systems to identify and address the social-emotional needs of young children and their families.



Visit the TTAC Website



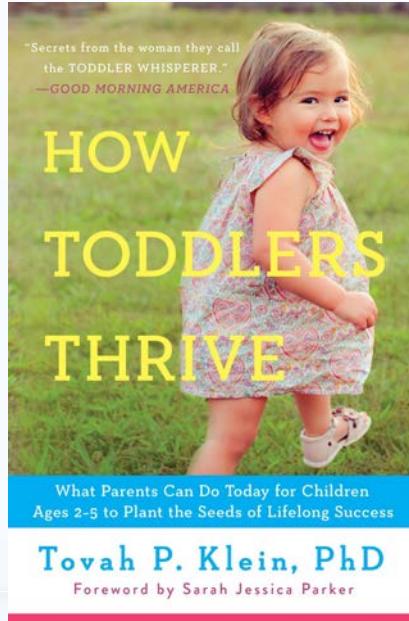
Explore all the provider resources at ttacny.org

A Variety of Features:

- View upcoming and archived content, trainings, and resources on the **Trainings page**.
 - Access videos, slides, and presenter information
- Contact the TTAC team by clicking on **Ask TTAC** and filling out our **Contact Us form**
- And more!

Have questions or need assistance? Please contact us at **ttac.info@nyu.edu** and we'll be happy to assist you

The Unique Toddler World: Key Foundational Elements for a Lifetime of Thriving



For the
Technical & Training
Assistance Center
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The TODDLER WORLD is Unique

- Wonder & Curiosity
- Exuberance & Passion
- Discovery &
Unconventionality
- Repetition
- Now-now-now
- ME ME ME ME ME

Primary Developmental Tasks

- Separation & Trust
- Becoming Me (Self)
- New emotions
- Language
- Figuring it Out

Relationships First

Builds the foundation for life

- Security
- Trust
- Care



It is all about connection

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Separation as a Developmental Task

- Attachment
 - Then separation
- Emerging sense of self
- Push-Pull: attachment & exploration
- On-going process
- Emotions: processing loss

Independence Begins

Independence
is based in their interdependence with adults

Walking is the Start



Figuring it Out

- Making sense of the world
 - Brings order and security
 - Gives sense of their impact and develops agency
- Who am I? Comes from exploring
 - What it means to be ME
- Emotions- A LOT to learn
 - What is this feeling?
 - Learning to handle (regulate)



They are SUPPOSED to be self centered (now)

FIGURING OUT ME comes first,

Before understanding others

A strong sense of self allows them to become generous towards others, later

*"I don't want to be
alone."*



THE WORLD IS A BIG PLACE

Hide/Return or Peek-A-Boo

The tension of wanting to be Away/Independent
And Together/Connection is PLAYED out



Why Emotions?

New for the Toddler

Foundation for development

- Social - (Relationships)
- Cognitive - (Thinking, Learning)
- Emerging Self- (Me)
- Self confidence (ME!)
- Understanding others

Emotions are the foundation upon which children develop

Toddler Challenges- It is a unique age and set of behaviors

- **Can't sit still for long**
- **Impulsive (suddenly)**
- **Aggressive (bite, scratch, kick, hit)**
- **Don't listen (except when they do)**
- **Transitions are hard**
- **Unpredictable- emotions/behavior shift without warning**
- **Shy, reticent, observer for long time, won't join**
- **Love to throw objects/food/materials**

What is your challenge?

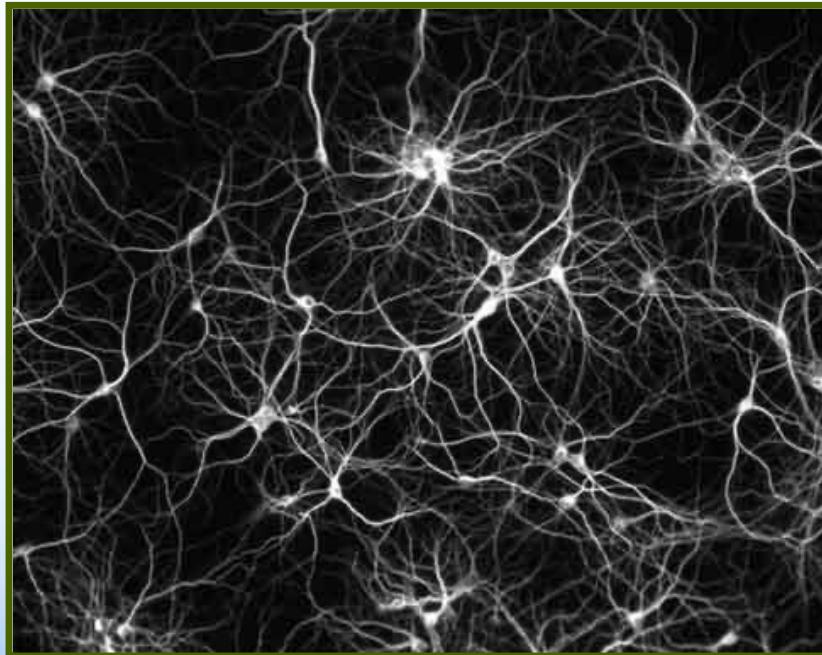


Knowing
your
push-
buttons is
key

What Underlies Toddler Challenges?

**This is a UNIQUE
Developmental Period**

Under-developed brain = Poor impulse or emotion control



90% brain development by age 5

More Than 1 Million New Neural Connections Per Second in Early Years

The brain is firing fast!

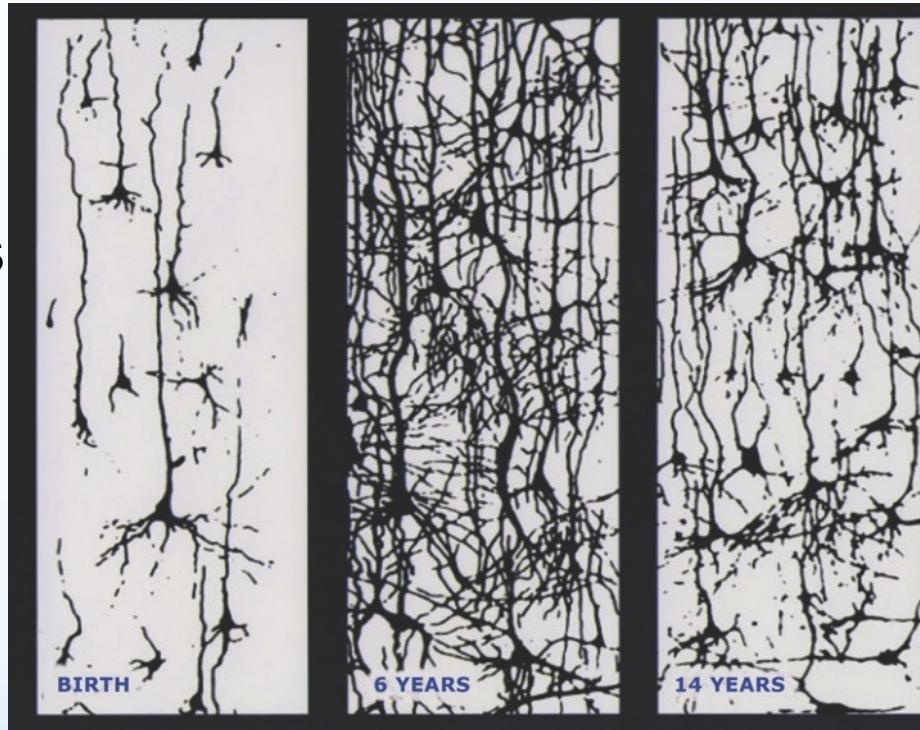
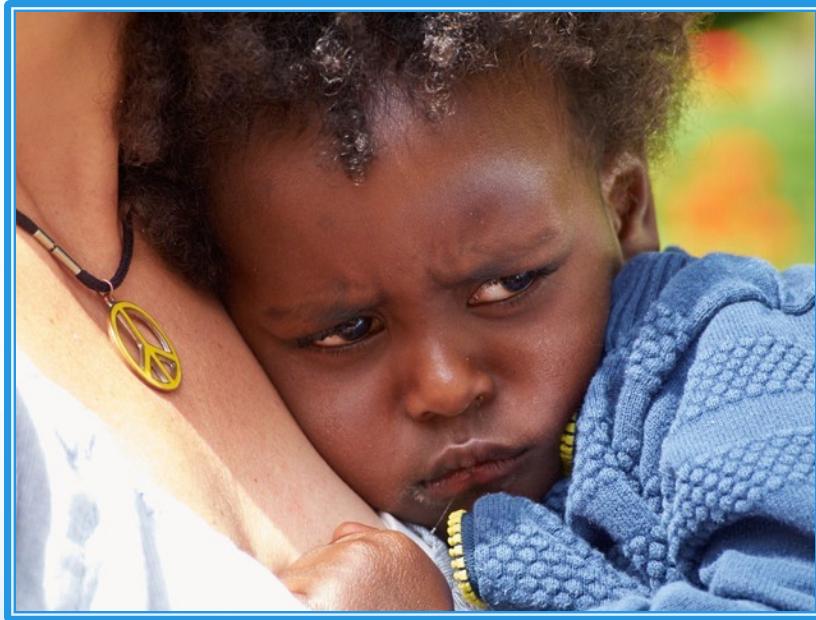


Image source: Conel, JL. The postnatal development of the human cerebral cortex. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Toddler Emotions are Intense Related to Brain Development



All Emotions Matter- It takes time to learn



Drawing from a child
who was left
Out of the group play

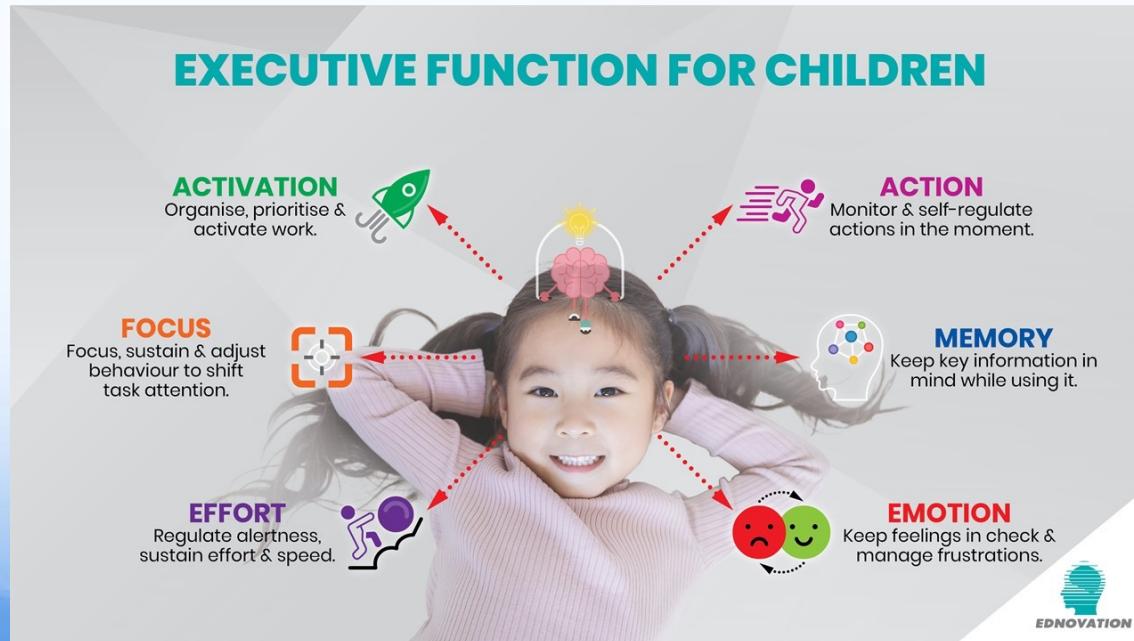
Developing an understanding
of all feelings- positive & negative

Emotion regulation requires adult input

Executive Functions

THREE Main Areas

- Working Memory; **Cognitive Flexibility** (Adapting, shifting attention, decisions); Inhibition Control (Emotion regulation; Impulse control)



Executive Functions

- Executive Function Skills are key for healthy development
 - Predictive of school, social & life success, above and beyond IQ
 - Needed for decision making, shifting/flexibility, initiative, agency, planning, sequencing
 - **Developed through play**
 - **Much adult assistance needed**

Why do Children Play?

Playing

- To communicate their experiences
- To make sense of the world
- To be understood
- To express and explore emotions
- To gain control/explore/discover
- For pleasure

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PARTICIPATING IN THE ADULT WORLD- 'PRETEND MEANS PRACTICING'



Their need for Predictability



And here is the challenge

For a toddler, the 'time' is always
NOW

Plus, the world is BIG

They have
NO (ZERO) sense of
time



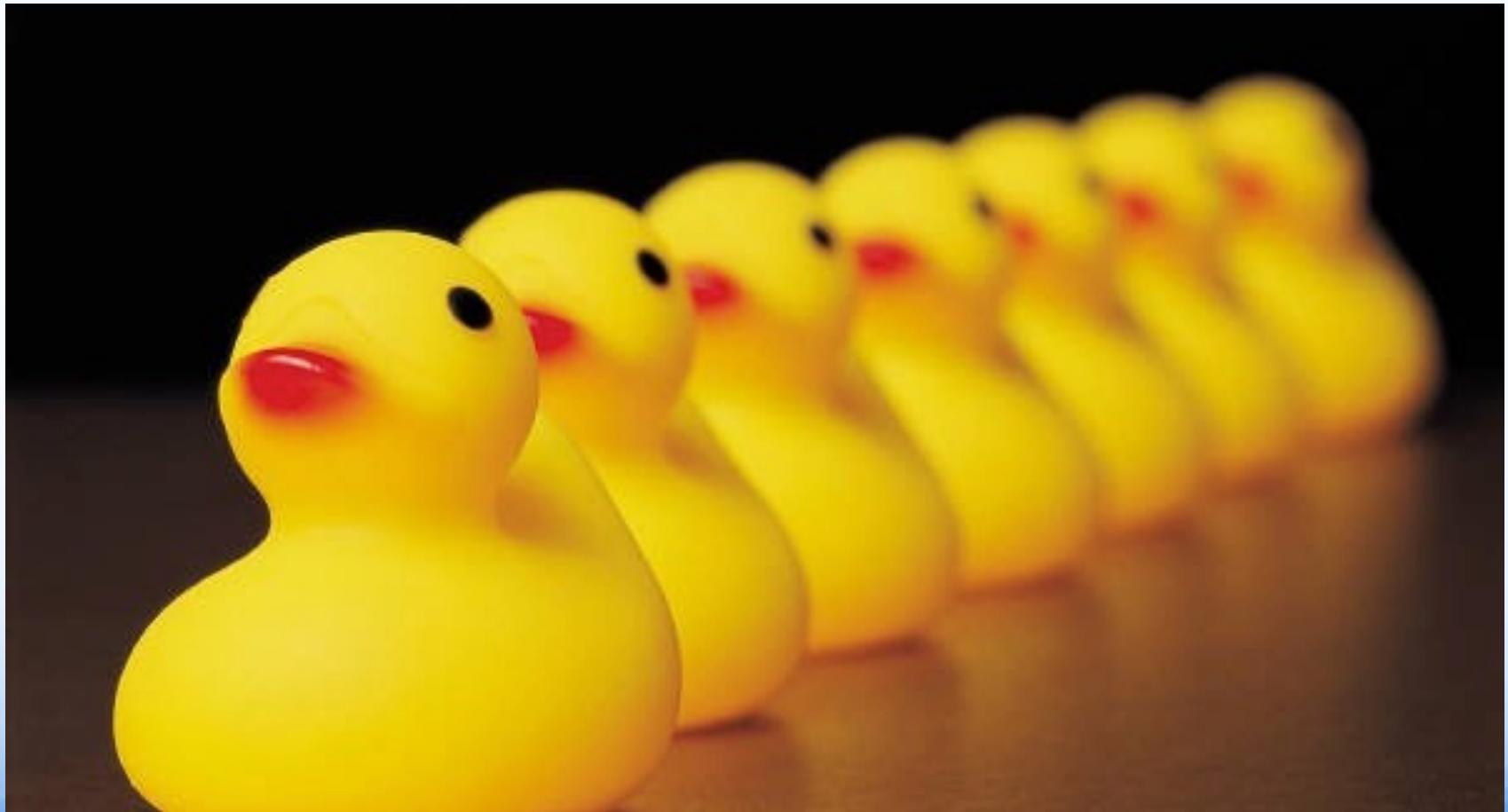
Bringing Order



I Need Control- at times, LOTS



Order, predictability, routines



Play as a way to Process...

AND

Emotions

- Sadness
- Fear
- Anger

Experiences

- Separation
- New baby
- Potty training

Stressors:

- Home fire, flood
- Divorce, illness
- Other conflicts

Processing Separation

- Hide and seek
- Peek-a-Boo
- Hiding & finding toys/objects
- Playing the "Leaving Game"



- Scarves, curtains for hiding

Why do they do it? separation!

- ‘Coming and Going’ Toys Tunnels, tubes
- Open and closing doors/lock boxes
- Hiding toys (sand table; in a box)
- Toy phones



Learning About Others

Peers:

roots of empathy, cooperation & sharing are planted as they watch and try to play with others

Empathy comes from being cared for themselves, they learn ‘this happens to me, I can do for others’

Conflict is a social scenario for them- figuring out their needs, and in time, the needs of others

Understanding the ‘OTHER’ Takes Time

SHAME Follows Sense of Self

When sense of self is new,
feelings are complicated

Toddler shame can come quickly, and hold them back
Recognize it, note that 'you are ok'; 'you can have that toy'
Or 'I am sorry I did that'

Processing Stressful Experiences: Doctor/ER Visits as example

- Loss of Control
- Feelings of blame
- Anger
- Confusion

- Doctor kits
- Nebulizer masks
- Eye patches
- Casts

Play allows children to have control and process
Stressful or traumatic experiences

Processing Emotions for Educators & Professionals

- Debrief the experience
- How did you feel?
- What was it like for you to experience the conflict/behavior/emotion of the child?
- How did you feel towards the child? (honestly)
- Identify what it pushes for in you. Reflection is important.
- Who supports you?

Foreword by AMY SCHUMER

Raising Resilience



How to Help Our Children
THRIVE in Times of Uncertainty

Tovah P. Klein, PhD
with Billie Fitzpatrick

THANK YOU!

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