The Practice of Nurturing Touch in Care Settings

“An Understanding of Touch & Strategies for Healthy Touch Environments”

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In this session we will:

- Examine our knowledge of touch
- Classify types of touch
- Examine strategies for a healthy touch environment
What we know about touch
1970 – 1980s

“Children of the Decree” in communist Romania under dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918-1989)
“Children of the Decree” had:

- greatly delayed mental and motor skills development
- suffered grossly stunted growth
- tended to grasp and rock themselves.
1970 – 1980s

Thousands of the Romanian orphans were permanently affected. They showed the same signs of social under development in later life.
Affectionate Touch Boosts Healthy Development

1940 – 1950s

• René Spitz (1887-1974)

• Documented direct child observation

• ‘Anaclitic Depression’

Photo Credit: Michael Carroll, President, Romanian Children’s Relief.
Image source: http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2013/07/31/the-orphanage-problem
1960 – 1970s

- Harry Harlow (1905-1981)
- One of the first to scientifically investigate the nature of love & affection
- “Contact Comfort”
Touch is a fundamental human need which influences:

• Physical health & growth
• Social & emotional development
Touch is Essential for Human Development

Touch is a fundamental human need which:

• Improves immune functioning
• Enhances attentiveness
Touch is Essential for Human Development

Touch is a fundamental human need which:

- Alleviates depressive symptoms
- Reduces pain & stress hormones
Classification of Types of Touch
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I. Touch avoidance
II. Everyday touch
III. Purposeful touch
IV. Touch as an abuse of power

Reference: Slides 12-19 Classification of Touch Types
Touch Avoidance

1: Respecting boundaries
2: Preventing abuse

Source: Warwick, L (2017 op cit)
Classification of Types of Touch - Touch Avoidance

Touch Avoidance

3: Protecting staff
4: Crafting distance (general & specific)

Source: Warwick, L (2017 op cit)
Everyday Touch

5: Consequence of group living
6: Task-oriented
7: Greeting

Source: Warwick, L (2017 op cit)
Everyday Touch

8: Acknowledgment (e.g. encouragement, reassurance, consolation)

9: Play

Source: Warwick, L (2017 op cit)
Purposeful Touch

10: Escalation prevention

11: Nurture
   (past, present, future)

12: Protective tool
   (child, others, adults)

Source: Warwick, L (2017 op cit)
Abuse of Power

13: Controlling
14: Violent
15: Sexualized

Source: Warwick, L (2017 op cit)
Strategies for a Healthy Touch Environment
Selection & Hiring

• Hire trustworthy people
• Operate zero tolerance disrespect policy
• Eliminate people who don’t feel right

Training & Supervision

• Quality supervision, both scheduled & in life space
• Train on appropriate touch (including reading, respecting & responding to feedback)
• Awareness of unmet adult needs in relationships with kids

Source: Garfat, T. (1998) op cit
Organisational Culture

• Create a climate where kids speak up if they don’t feel good
• Hold each other accountable
• Make relational safety a priority

Source: Garfat, T. (1998) op cit
“There are times in care you can benefit from feeling cared about like a hug, positive talks, and being consistently in my life. It does not always have to be touch but nurturing and caring about me will show based on your actions.”


Kibble CYC-Net Webinar 3
“Disability Rights and the Intersection of CYC Characteristics”
Nancy Marshall

https://www.kibble.org/kibble-cyc-net-webinar-series/