

## Research Brief

Information for the full length journal article:

### Journal

*Children and Youth Services Review*

### Article Title

Strengthening Children's Roots of Resilience: Trauma-Responsive Early Learning

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2019

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## ROOTS OF RESILIENCE

TEACHERS AWAKENING CHILDREN'S HEALING



## Strengthening Children's Roots of Resilience: Trauma-Responsive Early Learning

This brief summarizes the first research on the Roots of Resilience program.

### **Opportunity**

Early care and education (ECE) is a promising avenue for nurturing resilience with the nearly one in four preschool-aged children who experience traumatic events<sup>1</sup>. Resilience is nurtured over time through supportive relationships and environments<sup>2</sup>. Few ECE teachers receive training or support to address the needs of children impacted by trauma who may exhibit challenges in behavior, language, and communication<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Program**

Roots of Resilience aims to strengthen trauma-responsive practice in ECE through professional supports for teachers in home-based and center-based ECE programs. Teachers complete an online course and/or video-based coaching. The program was developed and refined with an iterative process akin to "fast cycle innovation" of continuous improvement<sup>4</sup>.

Roots of Resilience focuses on every day moments between teachers and children, supports teachers' self-care, wellness, and self-regulation, overlays a trauma-informed perspective on best practices in ECE, and utilizes relationship-based approaches to professional development.

### **The Research**

To create widespread change, programs must be feasible, in addition to impacting outcomes<sup>5</sup>. This initial study focused on feasibility, and also explored teachers' learning and application.

### **Participants**

Seventeen ECE teachers from family child care homes, centers, and Head Start programs participated in this initial study. The majority of participants had less than a Bachelor's-level education (69%), and identified as White (76%) and female (94%). Across two years of iterative testing, 11 teachers enrolled in the course only, 6 engaged in both coaching and the course, and none only enrolled in coaching.

### **Data Sources**

Data came from surveys, course materials (quizzes, discussion board entries, workbook entries), coach ratings, and observations of teaching practices.

## Results (see full article for details)

### ***This initial study suggests that the Roots of Resilience program is feasible.***

Fifteen (88%) out of the 17 teachers who started the program finished one or both parts (coaching, course). Teachers reported that the level of difficulty of the online course was “*just about right*”, that the content was relevant and interesting, that they felt confident being able to use it, and that they had sufficient background knowledge and comfort with technology to benefit from the course. Responses to open-ended questions noted the utility of features such as case studies (“*The case study examples were very similar to what I see in a few of my students*”), the variety of learning modalities (“*I enjoy the way the module is laid out. Audio presentation, video and some interaction*”), and practical strategies (“*concrete ways to build resilience in children facing trauma*”).

*“Online coaching was a wonderful tool. I was able to meet with my coach during quiet time while staying on site with my class.”*

Teachers’ feedback about coaching was strongly positive (average of 5.98 out of 6.00). Many commented on strengths of the online format.

Due to some challenges with technology in both the course and coaching, this was a focus of continuous improvement efforts across the two years. After refining some technological specifications, technical support for teachers, and switching learning management platforms, participants reported that the technology worked smoothly in year 2.

### ***Results also suggest that ECE teachers may also increase their knowledge and application of practices.***

Quiz scores (average 95%), self-reports, and qualitative coding of discussion board comments and workbook activities indicated that teachers gained an understanding of the vast majority of the content in the online course. Teachers reported that Roots of Resilience helped them learn and apply trauma-responsive practices (average 5.47 and 5.12 out of 6.0 for the course and coaching, respectively).

*“I learned new concepts that I wasn’t aware of, such as reasons why a child acts defiantly ... helped me understand them more.”*

*“I have a stronger relationship with some children that I use to have difficulty with prior to this course. I’m working hard everyday to do my best and try new techniques with them.”*

The coach rated teachers’ learning and application as “*very good*”, on average, and teachers rated their own learning and application very highly (average 5.90 out of 6.00). Teachers’ responses pointed to increased confidence, “*It helps to give you more confidence when you see that these are some things you already did but maybe didn’t realize why it was important,*” and responsiveness to individual children.

## Next Steps

Current research that utilizes a waitlist control group is examining outcomes including teachers’ knowledge, practices, and self-regulation, as well as teacher-child interactions and relationships, and children’s stress, engagement, learning and development.

*“Coaching helped draw my attention to ... the tiny moments we are completing each day have greater value than we recognize.”*

## References

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The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305A150107 to Oregon State University. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education. The funder was not involved in the study design, nor in the collection, analysis, interpretation or reporting of the findings.