Preschool Special Education

Teacher Brianne's Newsletter September 2023 Issue 1 page 1

Message From Teacher Brianne

The 2023-2024 school year is now underway! I hope each family has had moments of connection and fun over the summer. I can't wait to see the kids again! I have been reaching out to families and teachers to schedule sessions and will finalize that schedule by the end of next week to start sessions on the week of September 18. I will only be working part-time this year and not increasing my time. However, I have a very full caseload and will likely have to split my students with another teacher. I have not received any information or guidance on that yet, but when I do, I will contact families directly and introduce them to the teacher who will take over those students' services.

Coming Up...

September 18 - Preschool Services Begin

October 14 - No school/sessions for students (Teacher work day)

November 10- Veteran's Day, No school

November 13-17 - Parent-Teacher Conferences. No school/sessions for preschoolers. If your child is NOT in ECEAP in the Everett School district, I will have a link in the next newsletter to sign up for a meeting time either on zoom or in person.

Executive Function

The Center for the Developing Child at Harvard explains these skills of the prefrontal cortex of the brain, "Executive function skills help us plan, focus attention, switch gears, and juggle multiple tasks–much like an air traffic control system at a busy airport. Acquiring the early building blocks of these skills is one of the most important and challenging tasks of the early childhood years." This year I will focus on information about executive function and how to help develop it because it is so intricately tied to the behavior we often need to intervene for and support in young children. Firstly, the most important thing to know about the physiology and structure of the brain is that the development of that prefrontal cortex is only emerging in young childhood. We must temper our expectations, knowing that our adult brains have years of strengthened neural pathways for things like controlling impulses, delaying gratification and being flexible to changes that are not yet present in the brains of preschoolers.

Social Emotional Development

Therapist Robyn Gobbel who specializes in complex trauma and attachment teaches that it is essential to understand challenging behaviors by understanding the adaptive nature of the nervous system. She gives easy-to-understand metaphors for the different energy pathways of the nervous system that explain the behaviors we may observe. These are related to the three brain states we reviewed from Conscious Discipline last year, but I think the metaphor gives a greater depth of understanding to be able to interpret challenging behaviors. The three states include first the 'Wise Owl' that is in charge when the nervous system is feeling safe and open to connection and learning. Second is the 'Watchdog' that is engaged when the nervous system detects any type of danger. The third is the 'Possum' that is engaged when detecting serious or life threatening danger. See the infographic on the next page for more info.

Special Education: Inclusion

The Office of Public Instruction (the WA state governing body of public schools) states, "All students have a right to meaningfully participate in the general education setting, both academically and socially to the fullest extent possible. Inclusion is realized when all students, regardless of their designation to receive special education services, are provided with targeted services, supports, and accommodations; allowing them to learn in the general education classroom, interact with peers, and engage the core curriculum." What does that mean for preschool students? We want to both adequately support each students' needs *and* give them the most unrestricted access to classroom and community settings where they can interact with other children and do what they are doing. That means if they are already in community preschool settings, we want them to continue to participate in those classrooms and if not, they should have the time to access community-based settings such as playgroups, parks, etc. At this time, there is no universal general education preschool offered in Washington state, therefore our schools do not have classrooms for all students, but there are some general education preschool classrooms for certain populations.

Owls, Watchdogs, and Possums, Oh my!

An introduction to the model described in ***Raising Kids with Big, Baffling Behaviors: Brain-Body-Sensory Strategies that Really Work*** by Robyn Gobbel | robyngobbel.com/book

There are three different energy pathways in the brain.

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I call them the *Owl Brain*, the *Watchdog Brain,* and the *Possum Brain.*

OWL BRAIN

The wise Owl Brain is in charge when the brain and nervous system is feeling safe and open for connection.

The kind of behavior that you're hoping to see from your child- and yourself- comes from the Owl Brain.

When you are seeing big, baffling behaviors, you can be sure that the Owl has flown away.

You don't need to stop behavior. You need to bring back the Owl Brain.

WATCHDOG BRAIN

When the nervous system detects possible danger, it flips into protection mode and the Watchdog Brain emerges.

Inspired by Dr. Perry's arousal continuum and his theory of State Dependent Functioning, there are four different Watchdog Brain responses: **What's Up? Ready for Action, Back Off!, and Attack**.*

The watchdog is scared, but acts so scary that the Owl freaks out and flies away!

This is why logic isn't helpful and why previous consequences don't seem to matter.

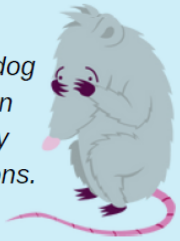
POSSUM BRAIN

When the nervous system detects not just danger but potential life threat, it engages the Possum Brain.

Again, inspired by Dr. Perry's theory, there are four different Possum Brain responses: **La-La Land, Trickster, Shut Down, and Play Dead.***

The Watchdog pathway increases activation but the Possum pathway decreases it. As the Possum Brain gets more and more scared, it shuts down more and more.

**Each level of Watchdog and Possum activation will respond differently to different interventions.*



Felt-safety is the number one goal.