

# **Napa County Health and Human Services Therapeutic Child Care Center**

## **The Therapeutic Model**

The goal of the Therapeutic Child Care Center (TCCC) is to provide a comprehensive and preventive program to the highest risk children in Napa County. Eligibility for the program is based on a parent's enrollment in specific county programs: Child Welfare, Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol, CaWORKS. Infants and young children experiencing related adversities are frequently living in unpredictable, chaotic environments and are considered to be at-risk for attachment, mental health and developmental disorders. For a child living in high-risk environments a day spent at the TCCC may be the only time the focus is on the child's needs.

### **The Therapeutic Model**

The Therapeutic Model is designed to provide environmental and relational supports to enrolled children and families. The goal is to build strong functional attachments and resiliency in a setting in which they can flourish. Giving and receiving cues, mutual regulation, soothing emotional wounds, recognizing strengths and helping develop a capacity to cope with adversity are among the therapeutic intentions of the model.

### **The Therapeutic Work**

We who work at the TCCC are the essential tools who carry out of the objectives of the Therapeutic Model. In addition to the responsibilities outlined in each of our job descriptions we create a therapeutic bubble.

#### **1. The Spirit**

We function in an atmosphere of calm acceptance, respect and kindness with children, their families and with each other. We provide supports that allow the children to be children, to have their needs met and to have their strengths and vulnerabilities noticed. We do the same for families and for each other.

#### **2. Dosing**

We provide tiny and larger therapeutic relational doses during daily routines, rituals and spontaneously as we interact with children and their families. This is how we build a template in the child that lets them know that they are valued and understood. Sharing attention and enjoyment is therapeutic for all. These experiences build a sense of self and confidence that become solidified in the brain.

#### **3. Case Management**

Essential to the Therapeutic Model is the practice of weekly case management. During classroom meetings we review child and family needs, behaviors and successes and we give attention to concerns, plan interventions and celebrate achievements. The meetings address issues, help maintain positive behaviors and reduce regression.

## The Therapeutic Environment

The TCCC environment was designed to provide an enriched milieu that is calming to the senses and supportive of attachment.

### 1. Colors

Watery paint colors, the use natural materials and minimal stimulation on walls are known to minimize stress. Photos and child art are hung in an organized and uncluttered manner.

### 2. Attachment

An important feature that fosters attachments is the installation of windows between classrooms that allows babies and toddlers to engage with future teachers and peers and to look back to former teachers and friends after transitioning. Attachment is also supported by a photo of each child and family hung where the child can gain comfort from the family photo. Art in the way of prints and posters on the walls of the center are calming in color and chosen to depict relationships and attachment themes.

### 3. Eating and Sleeping and Comforting

Children at the TCCC are held and comforted when they are in need. Babies are held for feeding and when they need holding for naps. Older children are held or patted when they want help at naptime or to cope with distress, sadness or anxiety.

### 4. Senses

Visual, auditory, tactile or olfactory cues can calm, startle or clutter a child's experience. Because they can assist or disrupt experience the sensory environment is designed to minimize dysregulation, fear and anxiety. Wall colors, soft, rhythmic soothing music and minimal clean smells can be calming and help a child to self-regulate. Tactile experiences can comfort and help a child feel safe. We pay attention to a child's cues, respect their responses and share information about their tendencies and temperament.

A comprehensive description about the physical environment can be found in the Napa County Therapeutic Child Care Center manual. The sections of the manual are to be reviewed annually and as needed. In Brandt, 2001.