GROW YOUR KIDS: TREE (Talk Read Engage Encourage)

Getting Started and Basic Principles (Ages < 2 Years) Ken Tellerman M.D. MDAAP

- Hand out toy/ book (can begin at 4 month well child visit)
- Informally observe: (more details on MDAAP website: http://mdaap.org/TREE.html )
- During developmental part of well child visit:
  - Ask “What kinds of things do you enjoy doing with your baby/child?” (discuss TREE concepts)
  - Ask “What fun things would you like to do with your baby/child between now and our next visit?” (review what to expect using Developmental Narrative)
  - Provide positive feedback for an observed parent behavior

Basic TREE Concepts to Teach Parents and Observe (convey just a few concepts)

TALK: Bathe your baby in language
- speak in “parentese” (using high pitch sounds to engage young infants)
- radio or sports announcer narrative approach (e.g. “you are rolling the red ball”)
- use gestures, label objects, give directions, play “show me” or “tell me” games
- talk during daily routines such as cooking, meals, driving, shopping, etc.
- sing or use finger games with young children

READ: Read regularly and enthusiastically
- let young infants handle books and older infants select books (let child take the lead)
- read in a lively engaging manner
- label pictures or play “show me” or “tell me” games

ENGAGE: Have fun together/ Make your baby feel safe and loved
- stimulate motor skills by using tummy time or placing objects just out of reach to encourage rolling or crawling
- provide warm physical contact and consolation when children are upset
- review the transition of play from “doing with objects” to “doing to objects” to purposeful play to imaginary play
- remain enthusiastically engaged when playing with children
- position child to easily access toys (minimize use of electronic toys)
- allow young children to take the lead and to problem solve before jumping in to help

ENCOURAGE: Be your baby’s cheerleader
- use positive comments (Yeah!! You did it!)
- praise effort rather than results (“You really worked hard on that”)
Developmental Narrative for Children Age 0-2 Years: Basic Concepts to Teach Parents and Observe Development on Progression of Development

Motor:
- Head, neck and upper extremities
- Trunk
- Lower Extremities

Communication:
- Vocalization: Coos/ Babbles
- Pre-verbal: gestures and imitation (“hi”, “bye”, “pick me up”, “peek a boo”)
- Verbalization: Receptive Language/ Expressive Language (single words, jargon, telegraphic speech)

Cognitive: Play and Learning:
- Does “with” objects
- Does “to” objects
- Objects have function
- Imaginary play

Social-Emotional:
Attachment in first year:
- “You and me”: social smile, laughing (sequential “serve and return”)
- “You and me and them”: stranger anxiety
- “Us”: shares delight (synchronous “dance and duet” and joint attention)

Separation and Exploration/ Autonomy in second year:
- Separation anxiety/ Oppositional behaviors
Observe Parent infant interactions:

- Take the room temperature: *warm and nurturing/ red hot and angry/ steamy and anxious/ cold and devoid of emotion* (see Parent Infant Observation Template and video #3)
- How does the parent make you feel?

Parental Challenges:

*When parent is unsure what to do:* “What kinds of things would you like to do with your child before our next visit?”

- Ask: “What fun things have you seen other relatives or friends do with their children?”

Motivating parents to try: Does parent appear interested in the program? (No/Maybe/Yes)

**No:** plant a seed “Perhaps we can talk about this some more at our next visit”

**Maybe:** process ambivalence and if interested, proceed with a plan

- “What kinds of things *might* you try?
- Pros and Cons: “What is the *positive* side of doing these types of activities with your baby?” “What would keep you from trying?”

**Yes:** proceed with a plan
Raising Concerns With Parents: when you note a parent to be overly angry, anxious or withdrawn

- **Ask permission:** “Can I share some observations and thoughts with you? It seems like his behaviors make you upset. Tell me more about his behaviors at home”

- **Third person technique:** “A lot of parents have difficulty with..... Is this something that you are struggling with?”

- **Reflective listening:** “From what you are saying, it sounds like your child can be difficult to handle... Tell me what it is like at home with your child”

- **Empathic information gathering:** “You seem frustrated/ tired/ stressed...Is it like this a lot of the time?”

If advising referral:

- If advising referral based on the prior discussion - state: “I am concerned about...It sounds like there is a lot going on...Would you be willing to meet with someone to talk about this some more?”

It is best to provide the parents with a name and telephone number to facilitate follow through or perform a warm handoff if a mental health consultant is available at the medical office. (Note: Summon the appropriate authorities if you suspect child abuse or neglect)

**When to Refer:**

- Parental mental health issues, domestic violence, substance abuse, significantly negative/neglectful parent child interactions, emerging child mental health needs and developmental/ behavior problems (Stay attuned to how parents handle crying, sleep problems and oppositional behaviors/temper tantrums)

- First line primary care interventions have not been effective or you are not comfortable handling the situation

- Parent requests referral