

Glossary

adverse childhood experience (ACE): An adverse experience in the areas of abuse, neglect, and/or childhood household dysfunction, and the cumulative effects the experiences have on a child's mental health and wellbeing.

assessment tool: A tool used in early childhood programs to determine children's growth and development over time, the quality of the early learning environment, and teacher-child interactions. The results of assessments are used for a variety of purposes, including decision-making regarding teaching intervention and practices, improving the quality of classroom environments, and identifying children with special needs.

assets: The strengths a child/family possesses that benefit the potential growth and development of an individual child.

attachment: The bond that forms between a young child, their parents, and their caregivers when the child's primary needs are met.

attunement: The degree to which adults and children form internal or feeling states (such as trust; safety; respect; and feeling valued, protected, comforted, and loved) that support relational learning.

authentic listening: The ability to be fully present and genuine while listening to the words and their meaning when someone else speaks.

biomarkers: The biological states (such as heartbeat, breathing, or cortisol) that are measurable. Biomarkers are used in studies to measure child and adult concurrent attunement, thus measuring the strength of the connection.

burnout: A state of exhaustion that can occur across social and emotional, physical, and/or cognitive domains.

caregiver: An adult who cares for children birth through age five, partners with families, ensures secure attachments and relationships between adults and children, and assists in young children acquiring skills across the four learning domains.

child-adult or adult-child dyad: The reciprocal, respectful, and responsive relationship between a child and an adult that forms a secure bond.

closed family system: A family system whose dynamics remain rigid over time and resistant to change.

compassion fatigue: The physical and emotional tiredness and stress that develop from providing demanding care to others.

deficit approach: An approach that identifies what is needed by an individual or group, rather than what is already present. A point of view that leads to a viewing of a person or group as a deficiency.

developmental milestones: What children can do socially, emotionally, cognitively, linguistically, and physically by a certain age.

developmentally appropriate practices (DAP): A perspective in early childhood education whereby a caregiver determines program policies, instructional practices, decision-making, and adult-child interactions based on a child's social and emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development.

disability supports: The professional services provided for children and families in which the child has an academic or physical disability.

dominate culture: A group of individuals that hold social, political, and/or economic power over other groups.

dyadic relationship: A relationship between two people that is mutually acceptable and provides human connection.

dysregulated classroom: A classroom that lacks routines or has inflexible routines, where children are expected to follow excessive or unrealistic expectations, or classroom management is lacking or inconsistent.

early childhood mental health supports: A scaffolded approach that focuses on the promotion of healthy social-emotional development for the parent/child dyad and can be extended to the early childhood setting or to other caregivers.

emotional complexity: The acknowledgment that we can feel more than one emotion at the same time and that emotions/feelings/interactions are deeply complex and layered.

emotional health: The ability at a developmentally appropriate age level to develop, understand, express, and navigate a wide range of human emotions, and to recognize and respond to the emotions in others.

emotional labor: A term that is used when a job or profession requires emotional regulation and the ability to display a set of emotions appropriate for the situation.

emotional literacy: The ability to recognize our emotions but also the emotions of others.

emotional resiliency: The internal reserves an individual has to be able to handle life's challenges and stress while still being able to be productive at home, school, and work.

emotional temperature: The ability of the caregiver to recognize the range of emotions that children experience, monitor the changing moods of children, and identify environmental triggers.

emotional wellbeing: The quality of emotional responses to life experiences, including the ability to adapt and change, demonstrate resiliency, resolve conflict, manage emotions, and generate consistent feelings of happiness and hopefulness.

emotionally available: When caregivers have a sense of wellbeing and can emotionally meet the daily challenges of early childhood learning environments.

high-quality environment: A learning environment that is responsive to children and includes highly qualified educators who have a solid understanding of child development and promote the development and wellbeing of the whole child.

inherent: An attribute, characteristic, or belief that is firmly connected to one's thinking and sense of being.

learn by doing: An educational approach in which children learn through hands-on and play-based experiences.

mental representation: The mental pictures and collections of thoughts, impressions, experiences, and features that represent an idea, person, or concept.

mindfulness: The process of focusing your awareness and full attention on something and being fully present in the moment.

mixed emotions: The combination of two or more emotions and the understanding that emotions/feelings/interactions are deeply complex.

neuroplasticity: The ability of the brain to change, adapt, and form neurological connections based on the presence or absence of stimuli.

neurotoxins: The substances that alter the structure or function of the nervous system.

nosology: The branch of the medical field that deals with the classification or listing of diseases or disorders.

observational notes: Written notes taken by an adult to record the behaviors, activities, and events of a child, often used to determine if the child is reaching developmental milestones and growth over time.

open family system: A family system whose dynamics remain flexible and change over time to meet the needs of the individual family members.

persona dolls: Classroom dolls whose identity (name, age, family, likes, and dislikes) remains consistent and are used to introduce social and emotional content through storytelling and classroom interactions.

primary caregiving: The act of providing primary care (feeding, diapering, rocking, soothing, talking, interacting, and engaging) for a young child.

prosocial values: Values that promote the wellbeing of society, including respect, empathy, caring, sharing, compassion, and helping others.

protective factors: A variety of concepts, ideas, and practices with the intent of providing protection and a physical, emotional, and psychological safety net for children.

resiliency: The ability to cope and adapt to adversity and the challenging events in life, using internal strengths and personal resources.

responsive caregiver: A caregiver who actively creates nurturing relationships and responds to the developmental needs of children in their care.

self-awareness: The ability to understand our feelings in relationship to what we are thinking, doing, and sensing.

serve-and-return behaviors: The back-and-forth interaction between and among children and adults.

Six Pillars of Strength-Based Caregiving: The Six Pillars provide the foundation for child well-being through strength-based approaches to the dyadic relationship between the individual child and their individual caregiver.

social and emotional supports: The supports that develop the typical skills and competencies needed for children to meet their social and emotional developmental milestones.

social health: The skills and competencies needed for healthy relationships and social interactions. These include skills and competencies to communicate with others, work cooperatively in groups, have our basic needs met, and form relationships.

strength-based approaches: Practices and approaches that support children's growth and development in a positive and supportive manner and build on the unique strengths of children and their families.

stress: The body's physical and emotional reaction to challenging or demanding situations or events.

toxic stress: An extreme or prolonged exposure to events that activate the brain into fight, flight, or freeze mode and cause injury or physical or emotional pain.

trauma supports: The specialized supports needed for young children who are exposed to distressing and disturbing events or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

vestibular sensation: Our sense of movement through or in relation to space.

wellbeing: A positive sense of self that allows individuals to lead happy, productive lives and to form and maintain healthy relationships.

window of opportunity for development: A period that is optimal for the body and the brain to learn specific developmental skills such as language.