

Nurturing resilience: Helping clients move forward from developmental trauma – an integrative somatic approach by Kathy Kain and Stephen Terrell

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This book begins...

“Somewhere in the world, every 4.3 seconds, a child is born. Many factors then emerge to determine how the child will grow and create her own individual self with a sense of autonomy” (p. 9).

There has been much written about resilience, especially in the early years, and how this is instrumental in children’s coping with stress and their subsequent life trajectories. This book brings a fresh focus on the developmental involvement of the foetus, infant, toddler and young child, how resilience shapes a child’s success in overcoming stressful life circumstances, and how we may nurture ways to restore resilience when it is challenged, so that the child may grow in selfhood and wholeness.

The book is written by two well-respected and seasoned researcher-practitioners. Kathy Kain is an international teacher and hands-on somatic therapist. Stephen Terrell has worked extensively dealing with the impacts of children’s adoption. Both these writers are highly regarded internationally for their work. Peter Levine, the foremost international expert on stress and trauma, says that this book is not just for child therapists, but for “all those who guide children, professionally as educators or as caring parents” (p. x). One of the many unique aspects of this book is that it is informed by a range of fields spanning from child development theory through to neuroscience, attachment theory, mind-body psychology, Somatic Experiencing® and Stephen Porges’s Polyvagal Theory. There is also an excellent section on the power of touch in children’s lives, with specific attention on children confronting challenging life circumstances.

The book is in two parts. The first section of five chapters is on understanding developmental trauma, a healthy beginning and how it can go wrong. In this section, the writers address such topics as safety and attachment. This includes a particularly succinct explication of Bowlby’s (1969) and Ainsworth’s (1973) often misunderstood seminal work on attachment. Other areas addressed, which all relate to resilience, include regulation, connectedness, prenatal and perinatal trauma, social mismanagement, interoception, exteroception, neuroception and how the young child develops their narrative when confronted with stress.

The implications of recent work with the Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011) opens up exciting possibilities for working with children to enhance their self-regulation and resilience, especially when they have experienced challenging life circumstances. The Polyvagal Theory brings a fresh understanding to what was once referred to as the fight or flight response in young children. There is also some interesting discussion on different patterns of behaviour children may outwork in their coping responses when responding to challenges and trauma, which I believe early childhood educators will find most informative.

The second section of six chapters focuses on regulation and resilience. What happens when children have adverse experiences or develop developmental trauma? How does this impact on their resilience and how does resilience help them overcome adversity? A resilience questionnaire is included. The authors also detail the array of thoughts, feelings, fears and behaviour children may experience when confronting life challenging events. Practical guidance is given on intervention, especially developing verbal, physiological and somatic narratives, and on the importance of the role of touch in early development.

Kain and Terrell make the point that while there is yet so much to learn about resilience in young children, there are some clear patterns emerging from research-informed practice. These include supportive adult-child relationships, high self-efficacy, self-regulation skills, and sources of “faith, hope, and cultural traditions” (p. 3). The writers affirm that safety and security underpin resilience and self-regulation, and this, I know, resonates with the heart of early childhood teachers. They make the point that “we can sometimes forget there are physiological and physical mechanisms that must develop in healthy ways in order to support a felt sense of safety and security” (p. 23).

While the book deals with some quite complex ideas, it is written in a very readable style using many case studies and exemplars to illustrate what is being discussed. It brings both currency as well as informed depth to foundational writings on young children and resilience. It is a book that you will read many times, for there is so much to glean from the well-researched and practice-based work of these two authors.

References

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