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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ECC RESPONDS TO THE CIVIL UNREST AND LIMITED STATE OF EMERGENCY IN WESTERN KINGSTON.

Early childhood practitioners from Western Kingston are now better equipped to help with the recovery and healing process that young children from Western Kingston will have to undergo. This is due to an intensive workshop that was held by the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) and funded by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) on June 4, 2010 at the Institute of Jamaica's Junior Centre. The one day workshop was attended by just over 150 early childhood practitioners and primary school teachers.

The aim of the workshop was to utilize the principles of dance, art and play therapy as well as parenting support to give the practitioners and teachers the basic skills they will need to help young children begin the healing process when they return to school on Monday morning. According to Prof. Maureen Samms Vaughan, Chairman of the ECC, interventions with children who have experienced trauma must be done as quickly as possible and by those who the children know and trust. Therefore, it was paramount that the ECC act as quickly as possible to reinforce the skills needed by practitioners to help the children cope with the extreme violence of the unrest and the altered situation of the limited state of emergency in their communities.

Prof. Samms-Vaughan in her presentation stated that in the aftermath of extreme trauma, such as the civil unrest in Western Kingston, children respond differently than adults do. According to Prof. Samms-Vaughan children will adjust more slowly than adults, and will experience a plethora of emotions, such as:

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Nervousness
- Confusion
- Anger
- Sadness

Often, the presence of these emotions may cause the child to regress, and exhibit one or more of the following signs:

- Bedwetting / Wetting
- Thumb – sucking
- Fear of the dark

The child may also begin any of the following behaviours:

- Crying
- Whimpering
- Standing and staring, not moving
- Walking around without a purpose
- Running around wildly
- Rambling speech or no speech at all
- Withdrawing from the company of others
- Stopping activities they once enjoyed
- Complaining of body aches and pains
- Excessive aggression
- Defiance

When a child begins to exhibit these signs practitioners and teachers will need to utilize creative means to assist young children to express themselves. The ECC, through its workshop, reinforced the skills that practitioners and teachers will need to help children identify and express their emotions, thereby, managing not only this event, but future traumatic situations.

Ms. Joan Davis a teacher at Carnival Basic School in Tivoli Gardens stated, *“I feel more equipped to face the children and parents on Monday morning, from this forum [the seminars] I have been able to develop a definite plan of action for Monday. I have always wanted to be in such a forum. I enjoyed the art therapy session immensely”*.

Practitioners are also key players in parent education and support, as such, they will be expected to inform parents about the signs and symptoms of Post - Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

These signs include:

- Separation Anxiety (very clingy to parents)
- Excess stranger anxiety (fearful of new persons)
- Avoidance of situations that may or may not be related to the trauma
- Sleep disturbances (nightmares)
- A preoccupation with words or symbols (that may or may not be related to the trauma)
- Play in which they repeat themes of the trauma
- Prolonged loss of skills (such as toilet training)

This swift and effective response was organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and is a part of the Government's overall strategy for addressing the acute needs of young children in Western Kingston following the civil unrest and limited state of emergency in that area. The workshop was also made possible through benevolence of the trained professionals who gave their service free of charge, and organizations like the Institute of Jamaica and Parenting Partners Caribbean who also assisted free of cost.

The Early Childhood Commission was established in 2003 with the mandate to coordinate, plan and implement development strategies for children in the zero to eight age group.

Contact:

Marsha Grant

Communications Manager

Early Childhood Commission

mgrant@ecc.gov.jm

Website: www.ecc.gov.jm

(876)922-9296-7

(876)922-6938/948-9405

(876)319-0997 (cel)

Fax: (876)922-9295

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Tips ECI practitioners and teachers can use to engage children

Art Therapy

1. **Free Drawing:**

Using sketching paper (lead pencils and colored pencils only), have the children do a free drawing about anything. (10 minutes). *This activity encourages self-exploration and an opportunity for the children to express an issue that may be difficult for them to talk about.*

2. **Feeling Drawing:**

Using sketching paper divide it into 4 sections. Have the children use markers and colored pencils to do 4 feeling drawings, one in each section. The feelings are mad (vex), sad, glad and scared. Discuss each feeling before you give them a couple minutes to draw either a face that shows that feeling or something that makes them (mad, sad, glad, or scared). *This activity encourages the children to identify their feelings. This activity can be explored further where the children can be asked to identify or discuss a situation/scenario and use the feeling drawing to associate their feeling to the situation discussed.*

3. **Safe Place Drawing:**

Using sketching or drawing paper, pencil crayons, markers, pre-cut magazine/newspaper pictures. Participants will identify a place, environment, and/or an object or individual that makes them feel safe and draw it. *This activity can be used as a coping/grounding technique. Participants can reflect on the image when they are going through a stressful situation.*

Play Therapy

Play is the child's symbolic language - children love to play. Children's play is an outward expression of their inner feelings, thoughts and wishes. Play reveals their:

- experience
- thoughts, feelings or reactions
- needs
- self-concept

Children use play to help them organize and make meaning or sense of their world and experiences in order to cope. In play children are able to manage the unmanageable, and control the uncontrollable.

- Children may re-enact experiences through their play.
 - E.g. a child whose house burned down may play out what happened, what the family did and said, the firemen not coming in time, etc. Or the child may play out the scene as he *wished* it had happened (e.g. the firemen coming quickly to put out the flames and save the day).

- Through play, a child can use blocks or cardboard boxes to rebuild a damaged home, or get rid of “a monster” who tries to hurt their family. In the fantasy of play and stories, Little Red Riding Hood and the three little pigs can overpower “the wolf” who is trying to gobble them up.

Children who have experienced trauma and had their sense of safety damaged may use play to regain a sense of safety, mastery, power and control. (For example, building “the tallest” tower with blocks, or creating an artwork about which they can feel proud.)

How can teachers help?

- Verbally reflect the feelings and ideas that the child is expressing through play and offer hope. E.g. “Oh, the lion is so scary he makes the monkey want to hide.
- Let the child know that the feelings are normal—he or she is not alone.
- Help rebuild child's sense of safety, mastery and control. Reaffirm that the incident is over. Help them identify the people and places that help them feel safe. Use praise and affirmation for the child's construction, action or art play. E.g. “Wow! That's a really tall tower!!” or “You did it, you made a beautiful drawing all by yourself!”
- Provide play opportunities and structured play activities for child to express or vent thoughts, ideas and feelings about their experience.
- Help children develop a feelings vocabulary. Using a Feelings Poster along with games will be useful.
- Help children create visions of hope through stories and play.
- Watch out for children's repetitive re-enactment of the trauma that seems to go nowhere. If a child keeps repeating the scene with a hopeless end, it may be a sign that the child needs to be referred to a play therapist, counsellor or psychologist.

Memories

Gently ask children to tell about their best memories by drawing a picture. Young children will show how they are remembering by their selection of lines and colours. Encourage children to think about what they remember smelling and hearing and how their bodies felt at the time of the good memory. Listen well. After discussing many good memories over some days, ask about their saddest memories in the same way, providing comfort for the sad or scary feelings. Right after, talk about good memories again. Let the children know that sad memories are like when it rains; they come back, but do not stay long. Tell them they can have happy and sad feelings together and that it's okay to have fun and laugh at times when sad things happen. At the end, tell about one of your own funniest memories.

Deep Breathing and Bubble Blowing

Teach children how deep breathing can help reduce their scary feelings, and help them relax. Blowing bubbles is a fun way to get rid of stress and for older children to practice relaxation breathing. Show children how they can blow giant bubbles by taking a deep slow in breath, and blowing softly, slowly and gently. Children can be encouraged to blow their sad, angry, bad feelings into the bubbles and watch them blow away. Have children run around to burst the bubbles that you blow. This can help to release tension and pent up feelings.

Feelings: Where are they in my body?

Provide children with outline of gingerbread man or trace the outline of children's bodies on large paper (e.g. newspaper, butcher paper). Ask the children about feelings that children sometimes have. Help them if necessary. Have children choose one colour each for "sad", "mad", "glad" and "scared" feelings. Ask children to think carefully about one of the feelings and try to remember where in their body they feel it when they feel that way. (E.g. they feels sad in their eyes, mouth, throat). Then let them mark those places on the body outline with the right coloured crayon or marker. This helps children understand and verbally express feelings. End exercise by talking about glad feelings, doing bubble blowing or other soothing activity.

Water Play

Water is soothing and healing and is great for helping younger children calm themselves. Fill a low sink, basin or other container with water. Add bubbles, and small toys (people, animals, etc.) for fantasy play.

Action play.

Children can let out feelings and anxieties when they discharge energy in run around play. Have them run races, chase bubbles, throw and catch balls, and so on. Have them run fast and then slow, or play red light-green light to help them with regulating themselves. Teachers can join in the play and then gradually lessen the energy level to help the children self-calm.

Finger and hand painting

Making painted handprints and then helping children to clean up can provide for the child a tremendous sense of nurturance and mastery. You can also do magic painting. Have children brush or drop different colours of paint onto paper, then fold in two and smooth with the colours on the inside. When they unfold the paper, there will be a "magic" pattern on it. Ask the children to talk about what they see in their painting. Talk about feelings that emerge in the discussion.

Puppet Play

Have children make and use puppets that can (a) be characters in their scripts re-enacting the incident (b) talk of the their feelings re the incident in a psychologically removed and safe way, and (c) be used to create a script of a hopeful future for them. their, families and community.

Caring Doctor

Explain to the children how a toy or doll has fallen and hurt its arm, leg or other body part. With comforting words, use items from the medical kit to attend to the toy. Carefully and gently apply band-aids (masking tape, or stickers) or a bandage secured with masking tape. Ask children to form teams of three and taking turns, have one child pretend to be injured and the other two to act as caregivers.

This exercise helps children who need comforting. It provides opportunities for children to discover their capacity to care for others and help themselves at the same time.

Build-a-World

Have children use blocks, cardboard boxes, clothespin dolls, animals etc. to build a world. Let them tell what it would be like living in the world they made? What would be in it and not in it? Encourage and support the children's feelings, thoughts and ideas about their world.

Clay and Play Doh

Children can find squeezing and molding clay or play doh really soothing and fun. They can use it to make shapes, or people. The older child can even talk to these figures saying things they cannot say in real life, or make figures of loved ones who they have lost. to act out scenes or to whom they can express their thoughts and feelings. Young children can release aggression or anger, or gain sense of power by pounding play dough in a fun way.

Play Dough Recipe

You will need:

- 1 cup flour
- 1/4 cup salt
- 1/4 cup water

Have child mix the flour and salt in a bowl then add water. Knead and squeeze the dough to make a clay consistency. You may need to add more water. You can add food colouring to the water before adding to the dough.

Bubbles Recipe

You will need:

- 1/2 cup of washing up liquid
 - 5 cups water (soft water is best - if your water is very hard consider using distilled or bottled water)
 - 2 tablespoons glycerine (available at the pharmacy or supermarket). Y
- Mix the ingredients together very carefully, so that you they don't get too bubbly. Pour into storage containers and, if possible, leave overnight to blend.

Clothespin Dolls

You will need:

- pipe cleaner
- an old-fashioned, round headed wooden clothespin
- glue
- markers to decorate your doll
- fabric scraps
- yarn,
- scissors
- a toothpick.

First cut the pipe cleaner in half and wrap below the head of the clothes pin to make the arms.ult help you make the arms for your doll. You will need to cut the craft stick in half

and then smooth the ends. Next decorate the face of your doll with markers. Now you are ready to add hair. Cut strands of yarn twice as long as you want your doll's hair to be. Tie the strands together in the middle and glue to the doll's heads. Once the glue dries undo and spread out the strands to create the hairdo you want. Add clothes next using scraps of fabric. Glue pieces of cotton fabric on your clothespin doll to create shirts, skirts, pants. Use pipe cleaners to create bracelets and necklaces for your doll.

Sources: *Creative interventions with traumatized children*. Cathy A. Malchiodi (2008); *Treating traumatized children: New insights and creative interventions*. Beverly James (1996); *Making it better: Activities for children living in a stressful world*. Barbara Oehlberg (1996).