
Gardening to Support Healthy Habits in Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article “Can Gardening Help Troubled Minds Heal?” from NPR. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Determine the ways that gardening can support the development of healthy habits in children who have experienced trauma.
- ◆ Observe and identify the children in your care who may have experienced trauma and could benefit from your support to develop healthy habits.
- ◆ Develop an action plan to implement gardening into your classroom routine to support the children in your care.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ After reading, use the questions to guide your discussion and action plan to support the development of healthy habits in children who may have experienced trauma.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support healthy habits.

“...gardening reduces stress and calms the nerves. It decreases cortisol, a hormone that plays a role in the stress response.”

Kristofor Husted

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the article? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ This article highlights how gardening benefits individuals who may have experienced trauma and other mental illness.
 - Reflect upon a time when you were gardening or experiencing nature. How did this experience impact your emotions or feelings?
 - How might gardening have a positive impact on children who experienced trauma? How can it benefit their development of healthy habits?

- ◆ Observe the children in your care who have experienced trauma. Which children may need your support to develop healthy habits? Who may benefit from gardening experiences to promote the development of healthy habits?

- ◆ Consider the ways that you can incorporate gardening into your classroom routine. How can you get the infants and toddlers in your care involved in gardening to support their development of healthy habits?
 - What challenges may arise when incorporating gardening?
 - How can you overcome these challenges?
 - Review the additional resources provided below (suggested: Gardening for Children from Better Health Channel). How can the suggestions provided support your implementation of gardening to benefit the children in your care?

- ◆ Develop an action plan to support the children in your care who have experienced trauma to develop healthy habits through gardening.
 - Consider the ways that you can promote healthy habits by actively engaging them in gardening experiences. For example, can you include them in selecting seeds to grow, in selecting a garden location, or watering?
 - How might you discuss healthy habits during gardening? Can you:
 - Model and Narrate Healthy Food Choices
 - Present All Foods as Attractive, Enjoyable Options
 - Promote Child Autonomy (i.e., encourage independence in the garden)
 - Carefully monitor children's progress and modify your plan as needed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about healthy habits:

- ◆ **Source:** Kids Gardening
- ◆ **Article:** Nurturing Resilience in Gardening – and Kids
- ◆ **Link:** <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/digging-deeper-nurturing-resilience/>
- ◆ **Description:** This article discusses the ways that gardens must be resilient, mirroring the resilience that children who have experienced trauma may display. The article explains the benefits of gardening on resilience.

- ◆ **Source:** Rasmussen University
- ◆ **Article:** Gardening for Kids: 7 Reasons Planting Seeds Enriches Their Lives
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/education/blog/gardening-for-kids-benefits/>
- ◆ **Description:** This article highlights the benefits of gardening on children’s well-being, including in the development of healthy habits.

- ◆ **Source:** Better Health Channel
- ◆ **Article:** Gardening for Children
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/gardening-for-children>
- ◆ **Description:** This article highlights the benefits of gardening on children’s development. It also includes practical ways to include young children in gardening experiences.