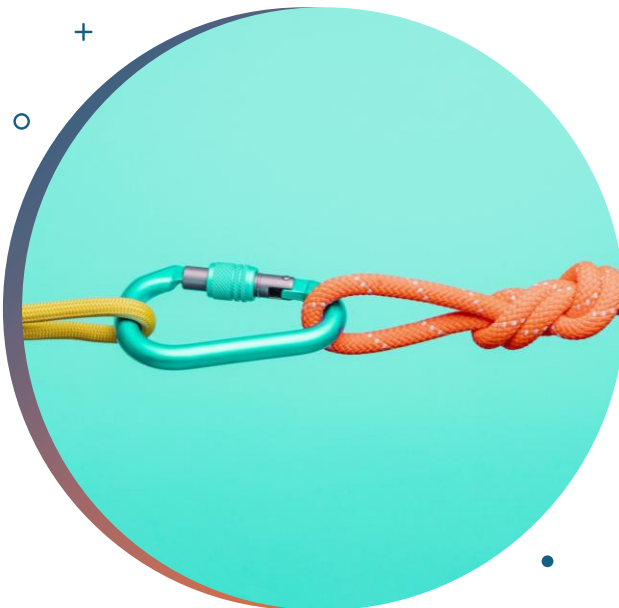


Creating Conditions for Deep Growth through Trials: Lessons from Children's Ministry

Erin Smith

1



Deep Growth

- Integration
- Secure Attachment

2

Necessary Conditions

- Secure Relationships/Secure Base
 - Availability (“the art of presence”; emotional and practical support)
 - Noninterference with exploration
 - Encouragement to appropriate challenge
- Secure Communities
 - Warmth with appropriate expectations *and* boundaries
- Contemplative Spiritual Practices

*Understanding how God changes lives:
(Q2) What is it about human persons such that they are transformed by God in that manner?*

3

What kinds of ministries (practices, structures, leaders) create spaces for deep growth for children who have experienced trauma?

4

Science requires measurement

- *Social support*
 - **Received:** help is provided when it is needed
 - **Perceived:** it is believed that help would be provided if it is needed
- What's the theoretical mechanism?
 - Attachment



5

Practices of socially supportive church children's ministries



Does bringing Star Wars characters to church increase social support?

- Child-level influences matter for the experience of social support
- Contemplative-reflective practices predicted high levels of all three types of social support
- Unstructured playtime predicted received support only
- Structured playtime did not predict social support

6

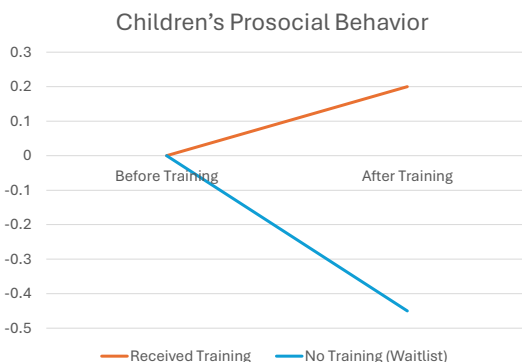
Quasi-Experimental Study: Latin America

- Analysis of non-profit pre-/post-data at 25 churches (plus 5 waitlist control churches)
 - 600+ children, 350+ children's ministry workers
- Questions:
 - Can we increase social support in children's ministries?
 - Does a change in social support explain/predict changes in developmental outcomes?
- Special Issue: Church as a Community Change Agent, *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community*

Smith & Crosby, 2023

7

The introduction of social support

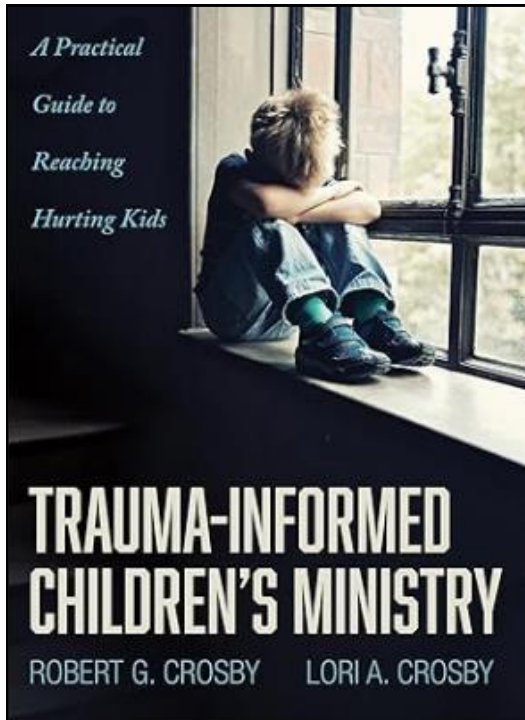


Children's Ministry Worker Reactions:

- "It is new in every way"
- "The barrier between child and teacher has been broken down. Now children come to us, talk to us, and tell us about what happened during the week in their lives...this has united us a lot"

LESSON: We can learn how to create socially supportive church communities

8



Values & Goals that Drive Ministry Choices Matter

Ministry choices (intentional or not) influence developmental outcomes

Values: Preparation, Awareness, Collaboration, Transparency

Goals: Safe, Regulated, Connected, Valued

Crosby et al., 2021, reachhurtingkids.com

9

Thank you!

10