

Pre Boston

Family Newsletter – June 2022

Monthly News from Boston Universal Pre-K for Parents and Caregivers

End of Year Reflection: Early Childhood Family Council

By Sarah Olia, ECFC Co-chair

As co-chair of the Early Childhood Family Council (ECFC), I'm extremely proud to report that our group had a tremendously successful year. The ECFC had active representatives from almost all the community-based program UPK sites and attendance at each of our quarterly meetings averaged over 80%. In addition, committee members participated in working groups (such as the cost modeling and three-year-old curriculum groups) and attended the leadership and advisory board meetings. During our ECFC meetings, council members had the opportunity to learn about UPK services, policies, and proposals and were encouraged to provide feedback on their development and delivery.

This year, a sub-group of the ECFC worked tirelessly to plan our first annual UPK Celebration Event, which took place on June 5 at Franklin Park Zoo. We had over 1,000 students and guests attend! This event marks the end of their UPK experience as they transition to Boston Public Schools or someplace else for kindergarten. We are grateful for the opportunity to gather in commemoration of the students and their families, but also the teachers, CBO staff, and everyone else who contributes to the UPK program.



Over the summer, we will be working on our vision for next year, which includes recruiting some existing members to remain on the council to help build out a sub-group focusing on alignment with BPS, refining the roles of our steering committee to build capacity, and brainstorming ideas for encouraging more UPK family engagement.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank all our ECFC members, and especially the members of our Steering Committee (Yrmaris Matias – Co-chair, Michelle Sangrine James – Vice Chair, Kai Phillip – Treasurer, and Scott Votel – Secretary), for their time, expertise, and enthusiasm for strengthening the UPK program through their service on this committee. I'd also like to extend gratitude to Jeri Robinson, Chairperson of the Boston School Committee, for her support of the ECFC and the encouragement and guidance she shared with us when she attended our meetings. Finally, none of this would be possible without Joelle Auguste and the rest of the UPK administrative staff, who brought the ECFC into being two years ago and continue to uplift and inspire this group.

Dear Boston UPK Parents & Caregivers,

Hope everyone is well and in good spirits! As the year draws to a close, we want you to know that we are very proud of your children's resiliency, their sum of learning, all their acquired skills, and all our accomplishments together this year!

We have had an opportunity to send the class of 2021-22 off in a celebration at the Franklin Park Zoo on June 5. It was priceless for us to meet so many of you and have a joyous celebration together! Even the weather cooperated to make this day memorable for us and your little ones! It was our first UPK Annual Event and we are looking forward to continuing this tradition! Thank you for your many contributions to this year's success!

Please consider taking advantage of the many opportunities to remain involved wherever your next chapter begins and know that we, on behalf of the Boston Public Schools, will continue to cherish our time and accomplishments together and will always welcome you with open arms while continuing work on improving our crafts and pursuing excellence through quality instruction and family partnership for all Boston residents!

Please continue to use the home links for the remaining unit content on our curriculum [website](#). Have a great summer and best of luck in kindergarten to our UPK children finishing this year. *"Oh, the places you'll go!"* - Dr. Seuss

Joelle Auguste

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Thank you all for a great 1st Annual UPK Celebration Event at the Zoo!



Supporting Children and Families After Mass Violence



From Child Witness to Violence Project:

All of us – children, caregivers, and communities – are struggling to make sense of another unfathomable act of violence. When these devastating events unfold, we can feel overwhelmed and at a loss for how to take care of ourselves and our children. Children and youth can be particularly impacted or frightened by news of violence in schools. As parents, caregivers, and community leaders, we can support children and youth as they cope.

A first and important step before talking with children about challenging events is to **take space to be with your own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and reactions**. Children are keenly aware of their caregivers' emotions and worries. Give yourself time to process first to prepare to model behavior for your child. It also allows you to check in with yourself: If you are too upset, anxious or worried about troubling current events, wait to talk with your child or ask someone else who is close to them to do so. The points below are designed to support you as you navigate this time with loved ones. You can also find these points and a full handout [here](#).



Make room for discussion. Even young children are likely to be aware of highly publicized events. It is important that caregivers take time to talk with children about what has happened. Share limited information – only what is necessary. When in doubt, start with simple, honest explanations.



Invite questions, listen, and validate. Letting children ask questions is one of the best ways to assess their understanding. Caregivers do not need to have answers to every question. What is more important is creating an open dialogue with your child where their thoughts and feelings can be heard and validated.



Maintain routines. Children thrive when they have a sense of structure. Although it can be tempting to break from routines during stressful times, it is stabilizing for children to have a sense of predictability.



Pay attention to all forms of communication. Caregivers learn a lot through their child's behavior, play, and nonverbal cues. Notice any differences in their behavior or play. Children may be more irritable, have difficulty focusing, or seem more "checked out." For young children, their play may be a way they express feelings or curiosities about recent events.



Limit exposure to news and media. Media exposure can overwhelm children with graphic images and words. Additionally, some children may not be able to distinguish between the present and what has already happened, leading them to believe that violence is ongoing.



Understand the range of responses. Some children may have intense feelings or reactions. Others may have a very limited reaction. This range is normal – we all process these events differently. Pay attention to changes in your child's daily activities like changes to their sleep or their appetite. If you are concerned about lasting or drastic changes, reach out for support.



Reach out for support. These events, by their very nature, overwhelm our ability to cope. It is especially important to access the people, communities, traditions, and belief systems that are important to your family during challenging times.

Additional Resources

[Talking With Children About Tragedies & Other News Events](#) by HealthyChildren
[Parent Guidelines for Helping Youth after Mass Violence](#) by National Child Traumatic Stress Network
[Coping with Violence](#) resources compiled by NAEYC
[8 Tips for Talking to Your Child About Racial Injustice](#) by EmbraceRace
[Managing Racial Stress and Teaching Kids to Do the Same](#) video conversation by EmbraceRace
[Supporting Kids through Racialized Violence](#) resource page compiled by EmbraceRace

STRIVE ([Supportive Trauma Interventions for Educators](#)) is a partner of Boston Universal Pre-K. STRIVE is a collaborative project between Boston Medical Center's Child Witness to Violence Project and Vital Village Networks that aims to help schools and early education systems of care increase their capacity to **identify**, **respond to**, and **optimally support** the unique needs of young children who have been impacted by trauma exposure.

Site Spotlight: Little Voices

In Unit 6 of the Focus on Pre-K curriculum, "Things That Grow," UPK children explore the life cycles of plants and animals. They reflect on how they have grown and changed and look ahead to Kindergarten. Below, UPK children at Little Voices in Hyde Park engage in Center activities.



Above: Children buy and sell flowers in a Garden Store.



Above: As their teacher calls out shape names, friends at Little Voices jump onto the shapes and describe their attributes.

Left: UPK children paint eggs for their giant bird's nest.

STRIVE Resource: Recorded Workshop on Self-Care for Parents and Caregivers

Boston UPK partner STRIVE ([Supportive Trauma Interventions for Educators](#)) is happy to share a recording of a recent workshop for UPK parents and caregivers. Find the recording [here](#). When prompted, enter the password: STRIVE. The workshop covers strategies, activities, and resources for parents/caregivers to practice self-care.

Self-Regulation Series, Part 5: Self-Regulation and the Brain

By Liz Muscolino, M.Ed., EdS

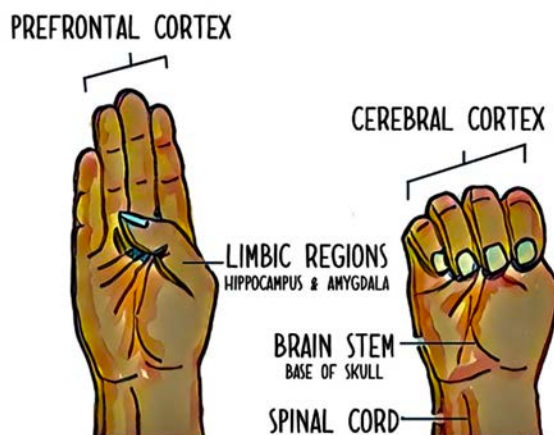
UPK Behavioral Health Services Liaison

What is Self-regulation and why is it important? Self-regulation skills allow us to successfully manage our day-to-day lives and responsibilities. When we are acting in a regulated way, we are able to solve problems, communicate about our feelings appropriately, and empathize with others.

When we are acting in a *dysregulated* way, it's the opposite. We have big, upset reactions to small problems, difficulty connecting with others, and difficulty solving problems. This month's publication is about what happens in the brain when we are dysregulated and a simple strategy that can help us get back on track.

In this [short video](#), Dr. Siegel explains the Hand Model of the brain. Readers can follow along with the demonstration to better understand how our brain "flips its lid" when upset. Dr. Siegel explains that the spinal cord and brainstem are responsible for things that we do without thinking like breathing and blinking, our limbic region is responsible for our emotions and memories, and the prefrontal cortex is responsible for planning, solving problems, and empathizing with others.

When we are dysregulated, our amygdala (represented by the thumb in the diagram) pushes on the prefrontal cortex or "flips its lid." At that time, the problem-solving part of the brain is unavailable. A quick strategy that kids and adults can use to get the prefrontal cortex back online is to "**Name It To Tame It.**" Naming our feelings or having our feelings named for us has a calming effect and can help get the prefrontal cortex back online. Some examples might include saying, "I wonder if you feel scared about going to the party," "playground," or "It sounds like you feel angry that you lost the game."



For more resources on using a brain-sensitive response to challenging behavior, check out the following resources from the Pyramid Model website:

[Teaching Emotions Activity Ideas](#)

[Comprehensive Family Routine Guide](#)

[Understanding Your Child's Challenging Behavior](#)

[Helping Your Child Avoid Meltdowns](#)