

Connect4Kids Event

Connect4Kids is a PTO affiliated organization that focuses on supporting and enhancing the social and emotional learning of the District 90 community.

Smart Love Family Services Presents: Helping You and Your Child Effectively Cope With Traumatic Events

**Wednesday, March 14th, 7:00 pm
Willard Elementary School Auditorium**

How do we help children digest all that they see around them--including the pain of traumatic events such as mass school shootings—on the news, the internet, social media and even in their own communities?

- Is it helpful to try to shield them from this information or to expose them to it?
- At what age do you have more open conversations with children about these events?
- Do you initiate those conversations or wait for them to ask?
- What are some signs that your child is struggling emotionally and may need help?
- How do you help children cope adaptively to these real traumatic events and yet help them still feel safe and secure?

Mental health professionals from Smart Love Family Services, a not for profit counseling agency in Oak Park, will answer these questions utilizing Smart Love's years of experience and expertise working with parents and children. The presenters will share information from a child development perspective—that is, guidelines on what and how much to share based on a child's developmental stage, highlighting the importance of not getting too ahead of children. The presentation will also emphasize the following: using loving regulation around access to information to reasonably protect children from what they are exposed to; the importance of parents protecting children from their own adult reactions/feelings in response to traumatic events; and the importance of parents being available to listen to their children's feelings, offering a close relationship where children can commiserate and cope with their feelings in a healthy way. The presentation will also teach parents some foundational Smart Love® parenting tips on how to foster children's inner self-esteem and resilience to help weather the inevitable ups and downs of life.

Bonnie McDaniel, M.Ed.

Ms. Bonnie McDaniel is a Counseling Intern at Smart Love Family Services. She is currently a Master's student in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Adler University and will graduate in June of 2018 and then pursue her Ph.D. in Counseling and Supervision. She is passionate about helping children and families and has extensive knowledge and training in working with this population. Prior to becoming a therapist, Bonnie was an educator and has extensive experience working in schools. During her 20 years as an educator, she served as an elementary school principal, district level administrator, college professor, parent educator, special education teacher and early childhood education teacher. She was a teacher during several mass crisis situations, including 9/11 and a school hostage situation. While Bonnie has extensive experience as a therapist and educator, she also has navigated crisis situations as a parent and understands the nuances of dealing with a trauma from both a parent and professional viewpoint.

Talli Hitt, Psy.D.

Dr. Talli Hitt received her Psy.D. from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. She is currently serving as the clinical coordinator at Smart Love Family Services while completing her William J. Pieper, M.D. Post-Doctoral Fellowship. Dr. Hitt has a variety of experience providing therapeutic services to children, adolescents, and families in both community based clinics and school settings. Prior to her most recent work at Smart Love Family Services, Dr. Hitt worked on the crisis team for a mental health agency that provides immediate mental health and therapeutic intervention services to children and adolescents in the community experiencing a mental health crisis. Additionally, Dr. Hitt spent a significant amount of time on the crisis intervention team working with mental health and community agencies, schools, and caretakers on how to respond to a child who has been exposed to a traumatic event or crisis situation in ways that foster resiliency and promote healing. She has given presentations in a variety of settings about how to talk with children about suicide, bullying, individual and community based trauma. Dr. Hitt has worked directly with preschool, elementary, middle, and high schools to provide immediate emotional support to students and staff following emergency situations, including staff and teacher trainings on how to provide ongoing support to students.

Michael Zakalik, Psy.D.

Dr. Michael Zakalik received his Psy.D. at The Illinois School of Professional Psychology. He is a licensed clinical psychologist with over 15 years of experience working with diverse populations of children, adolescents, parents and adults. Dr. Zakalik has worked within residential facilities, public and therapeutic day schools, inpatient psychiatric hospitals, and outpatient services. Dr. Zakalik has experience in all these settings with helping children and families effectively cope with trauma and loss. He has also provided parent education seminars on important mental health topics to parents in the community. Dr. Zakalik supervises doctoral candidates and staff at Smart Love Family Services. In addition, Dr. Zakalik is the Director of Marketing in which he collaborates with physicians, medical staff, educators, and schools in an effort to connect the OPRF community to supportive resources and mental health services.

